

tween the human mind and the external world, and with this, the whole innervated body then comes to be included into mind, which in turn seems like a definite resolution of the mind-body problem.

RENATA ZIEMIŃSKA

Ian Dearden. *Do Philosophers Talk Nonsense? An Inquiry into the Possibility of Illusions of Meaning*. Revised ed. London: Rellet Press, 2013. First published 2005.

In his newly reissued and revised book, the philosopher Ian Dearden attempts a critical inquiry into a philosophical position he calls “nonsensicalism,” which he takes to correspond to the view “that it is possible to be mistaken in thinking one means anything by what one says” (9).¹ He holds that an unexamined assumption to this effect is implicit in a large swathe of philosophical work dating from a period stretching throughout most of the 20th century (and to some degree extending to the present day), thanks to the widespread tendency of philosophers to accuse each other of talking nonsense. This is, according to the author of the book, most visible in the earlier and later philosophical writings of Wittgenstein, in logical positivism, and in representatives of the Oxford-based “ordinary language” philosophy movement, as well as in the writings of many of those subsequently writing under the influence of these. Dearden coins a special term to refer to the sort of error that philosophers are accusing each other of having committed: he calls such cases of error “illusions of meaning.”

The author proposes to investigate, in an ostensibly open-minded but critical way, the issues raised by the assumption that such errors are possible at all—hence the subtitle of the book. After an introductory first chapter dedicated to sketching the overall contours of the problem as he finds it, Dearden gets his investigation underway by means of a consideration of the view put forward in Norman Malcolm’s book *Dreaming*, according to which claims about dream-events having occurred during sleep are to be dismissed as nonsensical if construed as claims about something actually supposed to have occurred while the person in question was sleeping, rather than as claims reporting what a person just seems to remember af-

1. Unless otherwise indicated, all page references are to Dearden’s book.

ter waking. According to Dearden, Malcolm's argument that the former sort of claim is nonsensical hinges on the idea that nothing could count for or against its truth, as no coherently conceivable criterion exists for determining the truth of such statements. What Malcolm has in mind here, is that any such criterion would necessarily commit one to the idea that one can recognize that one is dreaming while at the same time being oneself asleep and thus in a state that precludes conscious awareness of what one is actually then undergoing. Dearden identifies a species of verificationism as the ultimate motivating consideration behind Malcolm's position. Subsequent chapters of his book then set out to convince the reader that rather than representing a *reductio* of other nonsensicalist stances, this case is in fact more or less typical in respect of the problematic issues it raises. Essentially similar issues are raised, according to the author, by the question of what it means for philosophers to accuse one another of failing to give any genuine meaning to the words they are using.

The principal concern raised by Dearden throughout is one that has been brought into greater focus by those of the more recent interpreters of Wittgenstein—Cora Diamond, for example—who stress that what this philosopher had in mind in both his earlier *Tractatus* and his later philosophy (at least as embodied in Part One of *Philosophical Investigations*) when talking about “nonsense” was not really some sort of positively meaningful instance of language use that, for reasons to be established through conceptual scrutiny, just happens to misfire in the context of its actual deployment. Rather, it is “austere nonsense,” in the sense that no sense *whatsoever* can be given to the utterance or to any of the words it involves at *any* level of description (be it that of an actual instance of someone uttering it somewhere, or that of an utterance isolatable in terms of its role within a functionally defined system of possible language-involving acts, or that of a proposition conceived as a well-formed conjoining of semantically and/or grammatically determinate constituent terms relative to a formal language system).

According to Diamond, “for Wittgenstein there is *no* kind of nonsense which is nonsense on account of what the terms composing it mean—there is as it were no ‘positive’ nonsense. *Anything* that is nonsense is so merely because some determination of meaning has *not* been made; it is not nonsense as a result of determinations that *have* been made.”² In the same ar-

2. See Cora Diamond, “What Nonsense Might Be,” in *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy, and the Mind*, Representation and Mind (Cambridge, MA; London: MIT Press/A Bradford Book, 1991), 106. Reprinted from *Philosophy* 56, no. 215 (1981): 5–22, doi:10.1017/S0031819100049743.

ticle, Diamond calls attention to a statement from the *Investigations* that is also clearly central to Dearden's case (and which that author also invokes), about what, if anything, it could mean to accuse someone of uttering nonsense: "When a sentence is called senseless it is not as it were its sense that is senseless. But a combination of words is being excluded from the language, withdrawn from circulation" (*Philosophical Investigations*, §500).

The bulk of Dearden's book consists in a variety of attempts to bolster the case for thinking that the constraints imposed by this "austere" conception of nonsense on any account of what it means to fall victim to "illusions of meaning" stand in a certain tension with any reasonable attempt to give a theoretical demonstration that instances of this kind of error are, in fact, possible at all, making the prospects for any such demonstration seem doubtful, and, in Dearden's view, casting some sort of light on the fact that no such demonstrations have so far been seriously attempted by philosophers inclined to engage in the practice of accusing others of such errors. The author's principal idea here—explored from a number of different angles over the course of Dearden's text—is that this constraint makes it exceptionally difficult to see how one could ever plausibly specify *what* it is that is being rejected as nonsense, if this is to be done in a way consistent with the fact that, for the person who fell victim to the illusion, there was, presumably, actually *something* about it that *did* invite one to construe it as meaningful.

Before embarking on an assessment of what is implied by all of this, I must mention another element of Dearden's account that runs through his book—one which seems straightforwardly problematic to me. This corresponds to his reiterated claim that there just *are* no uncontroversial examples of philosophical nonsense, and it is related to the point just mentioned, inasmuch as the author takes it to add force to his claims about the unclarity surrounding nonsensicalist accusations of nonsense. This thread in Dearden's discussion strikes me as tendentious. How can it be reasonable, after all, to take the absence of a general consensus on this point amongst *philosophers* as furnishing grounds for rejecting a position that is itself meant to be applied primarily to areas of the philosophical landscape subject to longstanding forms of *philosophical* disagreement? The classic target of such accusations within 20th century philosophy, for example, was the (crudely speaking) "Cartesian" thought that we can, in a meaningful way, employ linguistically conveyed concepts to invoke, in an entirely general manner, a distinction between a mental realm or mode of existence and a physical one. (This is judged nonsensical on the basis that the idea of such a generalized distinction apparently affords no tangible

reference points for determining when, and how, it could be appropriate or inappropriate to use it in contexts where some form of communal agreement about this is taken to be a constitutive feature of what it means for instances of its actual use to count as meaningful.) The fact that dualist talk persists in the philosophy of mind does, of course, provide a readily available example to show that the characterization of such talk as nonsense remains controversial within philosophical circles. Yet this can hardly cut ice with those who regard such talk as being problematic precisely *because of* its supposed insensitivity to certain constraints on philosophical language use—constraints that they would consider ineliminable on the grounds that they are entailed by a proper grasp of the necessary conditions for the intelligibility of communal language.

Whereas Dearden's approach to the first of the two issues mentioned above seems fairly open-minded—at least in that he does seem to be moved there to *try* to achieve some sort of balancing out of opposing viewpoints and arguments—his approach in respect of the second one strikes me as one-sided. Indeed, the only motivation I can see for putting such weight on this point about the absence of uncontroversial examples would be that one has decided in advance that, within discussions between those who are committed to the possibility of so-called “illusions of meaning” and those who are not, the entire onus of proof should lie with the former. It is tempting to take this as indicative of an unexamined and unprofessed sympathy for the sort of view that accords privileged authority about meaning to the first-person-perspective of the individual language user, and since this position has so far proved to be one of the most salient putative casualties of the kind of accusation Dearden has in mind when discussing “nonsensicalism,” one is led to suspect that his own motives towards the kinds of philosophy he associates with the latter are, in fact, essentially hostile.

In spite of this reservation, I must admit that in many areas I found Dearden's approach to be both incisively cogent and helpful—at least when discussing the issues *he* takes to be relevant to the topic of his book. Unusually for someone not starting out from a position of sympathy for the sort of tendencies in 20th century philosophy that he discusses, he has taken some trouble to study and grasp many of the subtler points motivating the approaches of the thinkers whose “nonsensicalist” commitments he takes himself to be exposing to critical scrutiny. Though it surely ought not to be, given the significant amount of time that has elapsed since such ideas about the philosophical significance of language first entered into circulation, this is an uncommon virtue. As such, his book certainly ought to have a use in prompting those sympathetic to the kind of thinking he

is seeking to critically engage with to step outside of their own shared assumptions and reflect critically on them.

Ultimately, though, I do not think this mitigates what are, for me, some underlying limitations that the book has, which I take to be bound up with its somewhat peculiar and problematic scope. These limitations issue from the fact that Dearden takes himself to be justified in isolating, from the very outset of his investigation, a specific feature common to the various sorts of linguistically oriented philosophy in which claims of nonsensicality have tended to arise, without giving much consideration to the fact that the status of such claims might be understood quite differently by different thinkers within that overall cluster of philosophical currents. (Such differences of understanding may, *inter alia*, lead to quite different assessments of the appropriateness of demanding, as Dearden does, an essentially *theoretical* demonstration of the possibility of such errors occurring at all.) We must, though, straightaway also note another feature, which, while partly mitigating the importance of the criticism just made, is nevertheless also problematic in its own terms: this is the fact that most—I am tempted to say all—of the cases in which the author refers directly or indirectly to instances of philosophical thinking involving a commitment to “nonsensicalism” are ones that actually pertain specifically to Wittgenstein (or those influenced by him or simply engaged in interpreting him).

Viewing the book in the light of this feature, one is tempted to forgive the fact that no attempt is made by the author to, for example, establish how far a different construal of “nonsensicalism” might be called for to do justice to the specific character of, say, Ryle’s or Austin’s work, as distinct from that of Wittgenstein’s. Instead, one feels invited to just take it as a book about the role of accusations of nonsensicality in the philosophical thinking of the later Wittgenstein and those influenced by him. The problem with this is that if the discussion is taken that way, then another set of concerns arise, centered on how appropriate this kind of general discussion about purported cases of “illusions of meaning” is when its real target is specifically the approach that the author himself finds in Wittgenstein. There are a number of problematic aspects to this that seem worth touching on here.

Firstly, it is worth noting that Wittgenstein’s later position on these matters, insofar as it can be said to have achieved any sort of definitive expression at all, accomplished this in Part One of the *Investigations*, by which time his approach is also characterized by a thoroughgoing tentativeness (and by the multivocal, dialogical character stressed in some more recent commentaries, e.g. that of David G. Stern), such as also makes it

controversial—to say the least—to attribute to him any sort of neatly encapsulatable, theoretically generalized stance concerning issues pertaining to language. By ascribing to him a commitment to a certain view about nonsense as something that arises in a certain positively identifiable way, whose *possibility* of so arising ought to be theoretically demonstrable if, indeed, it arises at all, Dearden thus seems to be levelling a critique at him that is, arguably, more appropriate (if it is so at all) to the kind of systematically theoretical position some commentators regard Wittgenstein as having been engaged in looking to arrive at only in the earlier, somewhat immature stages of his pursuit of the issues and methods distinctive of his later philosophy (i.e. in and around the early 1930s).³

Secondly, it must be said that when viewed specifically as a critical discussion of the later Wittgenstein's thoughts, a number of Dearden's points begin to appear somewhat spurious and unhelpful. In discussing the issues raised by accusations that someone who themselves thinks they are meaning something by what they are saying is the victim of an error of sorts, Dearden postpones until quite late on in his book all consideration of the issues raised by Wittgenstein's rejection of a so-called "Cartesian" privileging of first-person authority with respect to the meaningfulness of utterances—the sort of privileging, that is, that would take it to be a condition of an utterance's being meaningful that its speaker first, so to speak, *privately* take it to be so. Regarded in these terms, I think that many of the discussions in the earlier chapters of the book would have been more relevant if conducted from the outset with reference to this aspect of Wittgenstein's thinking (which is not to say that I think it entirely unproblematic myself). In fact it is not until Chapter Seven that the author begins to take seriously the implications of this idea, and even then he offers no analysis of its particular motivating sources in Wittgenstein's own thinking. To what extent, for instance, is it *just* a consequence of the analysis of language games and the conditions necessary for the possibility of coming to participate in them, how far a specific consequence of, on top of this, his

3. One need not hold that there are *no* elements of positive theoretical commitment in the *Investigations* to perceive this as a legitimate worry. It is enough that one regards any such elements as not extending all the way to the point where they would take in, and theoretically unify, the different ways in which issues traditionally associated with the concept of "meaning" figure in Wittgenstein's thoughts there. (For the purposes of this discussion we shall bracket out the further question—possibly also relevant—of what implications might be retroactively drawn for an understanding of Wittgenstein's thoughts about these issues from a consideration of the subsequent developments in his thinking evinced in *On Certainty*.)

analysis of rule following, and how far a function also of his considerations with respect to the idea of a private language?

This is important, because we might understand Dearden's own formulation of the basic issue with which his book is concerned as being more or less presumptive in respect of how it relates to Wittgenstein's later thinking, depending on where we lay the stress in our own understanding of these questions and others like them. The author consistently poses his question about whether "illusions of meaning" are possible or not as specifically a question about what, if anything, it could mean for someone to *think that* they are meaning something by what they say when in fact they are not. As I read it, what is assumed here is that a speaker's *intending to* mean something constitutes a necessary precondition for there being any *issue* at all of whether he or she actually meant anything or not.

That is an aspect of Dearden's conception of "nonsensicalism" which he himself does not pause to reflect on at any point in his discussion, but which surely does call for analysis. It does so because our interpretation of what it means to ascribe an *intention* to mean something to someone will itself have different implications depending on whether or not (and if so, why) one takes such ascriptions to themselves be grounded in communalities of understanding and, in virtue of this, to be at odds with notions of privileged first-person authority. Even against the background of a loose consensus to the effect that what makes it *possible* for meaningful language use to be intelligible *in the first instance* is the situatedness and communality of its public contexts of use, complications may arise. Different readings of Wittgenstein may generate distinct answers to the question of whether it can still make sense to think of a speaker as retaining, by default, *some* sort of privileged authority in respect of the matter of their intending to convey or achieve something determinate by their utterances.⁴ The worry here is that when viewed from the perspective of at least some

4. Those who takes the example of the builders' "primitive" language-involving activities in *Investigations* §2 to be significant as an example of something already recognizable as genuinely meaningful might, for example, take a different view of this from others. (Those others would include, amongst others, Rush Rhees and his followers, who take the example to show that there is something important lacking there which, according to them, we really ought to expect to find in typical cases of actual human discourse. See Rush Rhees, "Wittgenstein's Builders—Recapitulation," in *Wittgenstein and the Possibility of Discourse*, ed. Dewi Zephaniah Phillips (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 178–97. For the latter, but not the former, this additional something might be taken to legitimize ascribing, by default, a form of privileged authority to speakers about their intentions, where this would nevertheless not be seen as marking a relapse into any specifically "Cartesian" conception of privileged first-person authority.

of the resulting positions (i.e. the more robustly “anti-Cartesian” ones), Dearden’s interpretation of Wittgenstein will look forced: it will seem that in order to treat that thinker as putting forward the kind of views to which Dearden’s own questions and doubts could be taken to be pertinent, the Austrian philosopher must be presented as having had a view about meaning and language that counts as residually “Cartesian,” in a sense of this term that will count as negative in the context of the relevant reading of the later Wittgenstein.

The third problem that arises when we take the arguments of Dearden’s book as being specifically targeted at Wittgensteinian thinking is one that has, in my mind, a more ambivalent upshot. On the critical side, we may point out that the author fails to consider a possibility that has, in fact, been taken up and explored by at least one noted scholar and philosopher whose work is essentially sympathetic to Wittgenstein. This consists in accepting that what follows from the “austere” conception of nonsense is a conclusion not far removed from that which Dearden himself seems to favour—to the effect that “nonsensicalist” accusations are, though not wholly incoherent, at least seriously misleading, as they imply, but fail to shed light on, the possibility of first discerning a meaning in the conjunction of the utterance and its actual context, only to cancel it when some more restrictive criterion of meaningfulness is brought to bear on both of these—while nevertheless extracting from *this* a set of implications with comparable philosophical force to those traditionally associated by Wittgensteinians with accusations of nonsense. The main line of argument here is that what is going on when one accuses someone of uttering nonsense in this “austere” sense is that one says that the thought that they appear (to themselves and, potentially, to at least some others) to be uttering, or, if one prefers, the utterance they appear (ditto . . .) to be making, relative to *that* context, is, after all, not one that could really be properly delivered *in* that context, as it demands a different one (i.e. a different context, which, moreover, should not simply be assumed to be available).⁵

On the other hand, there is also an aspect to this that speaks in favor of Dearden’s approach. The kind of interpretation just referred to might be taken to correspond to the sort of thing Dearden himself dismisses out of

5. See Lars Hertzberg, “The Sense is Where You Find It,” in *Wittgenstein in America*, ed. Timothy G. McCarthy and Sean C. Stidd (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), 90–103. At least, this is how I understand Hertzberg’s point. A more complete version of the same article is available from its author’s website, *Lars Hertzberg Philosophy*, accessed 8 February 2014, http://web.abo.fi/fak/hf/filosofi/Staff/lhertzbe/Text/The_Sense_Is_Where_You_Find_It.pdf.

hand when he says that one of the few available recourses for the defender of nonsensicalism in seeking to meet the constraints imposed by the “*aus-tere*” conception of nonsense is to just stipulate some conditions that are to be met for something to count as having sense that are more stringent—or elevated—than those assumed by the speaker. Dearden may be wrong to expressly link this with an overriding by others of the speaker’s own particular understanding of the appropriate conditions for counting something as meaningful, and to assume that any such stipulation is arbitrary and thus inherently suspect unless and until shown otherwise. Nevertheless, in a sense his reading does help us to grasp something interesting here, which is that we are never quite sure with Wittgenstein how far his own points are meant to constitute a method whose validity is independent of its capacity to deliver concrete and specific insights (which is how Dearden is inclined to characterize it), and how far it should be read as a special sort of expressive demonstration on his part of some more substantive commitments that he had, but did not feel he could state directly, with respect to the underlying value and meaning of human life.

To construe Wittgenstein along only the former lines—as Dearden himself tends to do—is, I think, to see him as primarily the inheritor of the sort of proceduralistic impulse within Western philosophy one finds displayed in the readings of Kant that have sought to identify in parts of his work a precursor to the essentially formal concerns that have tended to underlie much of analytic philosophy—at least in the earlier part of the 20th century and, arguably (albeit in more complex ways) subsequently as well. To construe him exclusively along the latter lines, as not stipulating conditions in order to satisfy the demands of a *method* but rather in order to do justice to some deeper intuitions about what is *substantively* important in human affairs and human life, is, I think, to see him as one might see Kant, if one found it more meaningful to see *that* philosopher’s concern with the autonomy of reason as it pertains to both theoretical knowledge and practical morality as ultimately motivated by a need to do justice to some still more fundamental intuitions about what it is that is of ultimate value in human existence.

My own sense is that with both of these thinkers, we must own up to a deep-seated ambivalence in ourselves with respect to how much importance we should feel compelled to put on either sort of reading. As philosophers seeking to delimit the scope of the empirical sciences and somehow contain the implications of the naturalistic precepts that their methodology appears to impose on us, we may feel pulled towards a proceduralistic reading of either or both of them, whereby they can be thought of as fur-

nishing us with commitments to forms of understanding that hold out the promise of linking the universal bindingness of natural law with something that, though free of dogma, is nevertheless still (at some level) a recognizable reflection of our distinctively human concerns. Yet as philosophers seeking to do justice reflectively to our own intuitions about what is of ultimate value in human life, we are surely bound to want to look beyond this, too—to seek out some more substantive dimension within the thinking of these philosophers such as may help us to formulate and come to terms with our own intuitions about such things. The danger, as I see it, is that if we feel that what we then encounter there somehow falls short of what we would wish to see captured in a substantive philosophical account of the human condition as we ourselves recognize it, then the temptation arises to find refuge in the proceduralistically oriented interpretations of these thinkers' ideas, not because one is primarily concerned with issues relating to the threat of scientism, naturalism, determinism, and so on, but because this may serve to distract one from the question one really ought then to be asking—namely, why it is that one was dissatisfied, if indeed one was, with the substantive dimension one thought one had also discerned in their thought.

CARL HUMPHRIES

Josef G. F. Rothhaupt, and Wilhelm Vossenkuhl, eds. *Kulturen und Werte: Wittgensteins Kringel-Buch als Initialtext. Über Wittgenstein*, 1. Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter, 2013.

For several years now, researchers dealing with the life and philosophy of Wittgenstein have had at their disposal a comprehensive tool in the form of the *Bergen Electronic Edition* of the *Nachlass*, in which “all of Wittgenstein’s unpublished manuscripts, typescripts, dictations, and most of his notebooks,”¹ totaling over three million words, have been collected in one place, and of which certainly no more than a third are available in printed editions of his writings. This is especially surprising if one realizes that

1. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Wittgenstein’s Nachlass: The Bergen Electronic Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press / Charlottesville, VA: InteLex Corp., 1998–2001), <http://www.nlx.com/collections/124>.