ENTANGLED SENSE

An Inquiry into the Philosophical Significance of Meaning and Rules

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis investigates the philosophical significance of linguistic meaning and rules. It questions the assumption that rules of usage can function in substantial philosophical explanations of how meaning arises or of how communication is possible. Rather, such rules are important because they are often instrumental in the treatment of conceptual confusions.

Chapter 1 argues that rules of usage are philosophically significant not as prescriptive norms, but as descriptions of language use. They cannot determine the meaning of words, nor draw the line between meaningful and nonsensical speech. Rather, they function as posterior registrations of expressed meanings. Illustrations are given of how such rules can be used to lay bare the structure philosophical problems.

Chapter 2 connects the investigation to discussions of nonsensicality in the work of Cora Diamond, James Conant and Lars Hertzberg. The role of nonsense in philosophy is considered, and the character and philosophical significance of rules of usage are explored in further detail.

Chapter 3 deals with Saul Kripke's meaning-sceptical reading of Wittgenstein. The relation between rules and intentional phenomena such as wishes and expectations is investigated in detail, together with the importance of practical agreement as a background to talk of meaning and rules.

Chapter 4 discusses problems surrounding the epistemology of understanding and communication. The exchange between John McDowell and Michael Dummett on these issues is considered in detail, and those aspects of McDowell's position that are congenial to what has been argued in previous chapters are identified.

Keywords: meaning, nonsense, rule-following, normativity, philosophical method, understanding, communication, meaning scepticism, Conant, Diamond, Dummett, Hertzberg, Kripke, McDowell, Wittgenstein.

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Acknowledgements

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Introduction

Six years ago, my plan was to write a dissertation on traditional forms of epistemological scepticism, inspired by Wittgenstein's discussions in *On Certainty*.[1] However, it seemed natural also to include a chapter on that new form of scepticism – 'meaning scepticism' – which had been attributed to Wittgenstein by some of his recent commentators.[2] I therefore began studying the vast literature on that topic, as well as related work on Wittgenstein's so-called 'rule-following considerations'. These investigations proved more absorbing than I originally expected, and I soon found myself drifting away from my original plan. After a while, I decided to leave traditional scepticism aside altogether, and concentrate instead on the problems of meaning and rules. What I submit here are the fruits of that labour.

My aim in this introduction is not to give a comprehensive survey of the discussions and results presented below. In fact, such an initial general overview would be distorting rather than informative. For it is essential to my approach that the results are not stated in free-floating general terms, but spring from detailed considerations of particular examples. Since it would be misplaced to burden an introduction with such detailed considerations, I will limit myself to indicating, very briefly, a viewpoint which permeates my thinking about meaning and rules.

To give the reader some idea of what this viewpoint is, I quote Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*:

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[1] L. Wittgenstein, *On Certainty/Über Gewißheit*, eds. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969).

[2] Most famously by Saul Kripke, in his *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language. An Elementary Exposition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982).

Every sign *by itself* seems dead. *What* gives it life? –In use it is *alive*. Is life breathed into it there? –Or is the *use* its life?[3]

This remark might be read in two very different ways. One is to conceive it as the embryo of an explanatory account of meaning. Thus construed, the remark constitutes an attempt to say how linguistic elements that are primarily given as dead and meaningless objects (sounds, ink-marks), are infused with life and meaning. According to this reading, Wittgenstein's point is that it is our use of such intrinsically inert elements which somehow *makes* them meaningful.

The other way to read the remark is as a repudiation of the alleged need for such an explanatory answer. According to this second reading, Wittgenstein rejects the assumption that linguistic expressions are primarily given as dead and meaningless objects. *Nothing* is needed to confer meaning on the expressions, since they are first and foremost expressions *already* in meaningful use.

It seems fair to say that, in the contemporary discussion of meaning and rules, it is usually taken for granted that the fundamental task of the philosophy of language is to provide an explanatory account of meaning. The basic question is supposed to be whether a rule-governed use of words can be what infuses those words with 'life'. One of my central aims in what follows is to question that assumption. In brief, I will argue that the explanatory endeavour puts the cart before the horse. Often linguistic expressions are *not* primarily given as intrinsically inert units that need to be somehow infused with meaning. On the contrary, what comes *first* is their being used to express a certain sense. The conception of such expressions as intrinsically 'dead' signs constitutes, at best, a posterior reconstruction.

The present study may be seen as an attempt to clarify this point, and to spell out some of its implications. One immediate consequence is that rules do not play the sort of explanatory role that is often demanded from them. They neither can nor need to explain the meaningfulness of language. Rather, they serve to describe linguistic practice from within, while taking the significance of the described practice for granted.

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[3] L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations/Philosophische Untersuchungen*, 2nd ed., eds. G. E. M. Anscombe and R. Rhees (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958), § 432. Original emphases.

If rules cannot and need not play an explanatory role, then in what does their philosophical significance consist? The answer given in this book is that the rules are often instrumental in the treatment of philosophical problems. But this is not because they make it possible for the philosopher to somehow demonstrate what constitutes the solution to such philosophical difficulties. On the contrary, almost everything I will say is directly opposed to such a conception of philosophical method. Rather, the significance of the rules is that they can be used to describe and remind us of differences in usage that we are prone to overlook when we philosophise. As will be repeatedly illustrated, such descriptions can make us recognise the structure of our difficulties, and thereby help us rid us of these problems.

The book consists of four chapters and a brief conclusion. Chapter 1, 'Meaning, Rules and Philosophical Problems', has an introductory character. Themes that play a central role in subsequent chapters are introduced by means of concrete examples. Illustrations are also given of how rules of usage can be used to disentangle philosophical problems.

In Chapter 2, 'Rules and Nonsense', the investigation is deepened, and connected to discussions of nonsensicality in the work of Cora Diamond, James Conant and Lars Hertzberg. I discuss the role of nonsense in philosophy, and clarify further the character and philosophical significance of rules of usage.

Chapter 3, 'Meaning and Rule-Following', discusses Saul Kripke's meaning-sceptical reading of Wittgenstein. The relation between rules and so-called 'intentional' phenomena such as wishes and expectations is investigated in detail, together with the importance of practical agreement as a background to talk of meaning and rules.

Chapter 4, 'Understanding and Communication', deals with problems surrounding the epistemology of understanding. I discuss at length an exchange between John McDowell and Michael Dummett on these issues, and identify the respects in which the kind of outlook defended by McDowell is congenial to what I have said in earlier chapters.

My discussions are clearly influenced by Wittgenstein's thinking, as well as by the work of some of his commentators.[4] Let me emphasise, however, that

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[4] Besides Cora Diamond's and James Conant's work, I would like to mention Edward Minar's careful and subtle investigations, especially his 'Paradox and Privacy: On §§ 201-202 of

the present study is not an exegetical work. I make no exegetical claims, except where this is explicitly stated. The focus is on the problems themselves, rather than on what Wittgenstein, or anyone else, happen to think about their solution.

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Meaning, Rules and Philosophical Problems

1.1. Introduction

A central idea in much contemporary philosophy is that the meanings of linguistic expressions are to be sought not in some Platonic realm or in the private mental life of speakers, but in the public use of language. In one form or another, this idea plays a central role in the writings of such influential figures as John Dewey, Willard Van Orman Quine, Michael Dummett, Hilary Putnam and Donald Davidson. Above all, it has become associated with the later Wittgenstein.

Quine formulates this idea as follows:

> [T]here is no more to the meaning of an expression than the overt use that we make of the expression. Language is a skill that each of us acquires from his fellows through mutual observation, emulation, and correction in jointly observable circumstances. When we learn the meaning of an expression we learn only what is observable in overt verbal behaviour and its circumstances.[5]

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[5] W.V.O. Quine, *Quiddities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 130. Here are some other programmatic statements of the same general idea: "Meaning [...] is not a psychic existence; it is primarily a property of behavior." (J. Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (La Salle IL: Open Court, 1925), p. 179); "[A] grasp of the meaning of an expression must be exhaustively manifested by the *use* of that expression." (M. Dummett, *Elements of Intuitionism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), p. 376; original emphasis); "To adopt a theory of meaning according to which a language whose whole use is specified still lacks something – namely its 'interpretation' – is to accept a problem which *can* only have crazy solutions. [...] Either the use *already* fixes the 'interpretation' or *nothing* can." (H. Putnam, *Philosophical Papers. Vol. 3* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 24; original emphases); "As a matter of principle, then, meaning, and by its connection with meaning, belief also, are open to public determination. [...] What a fully informed interpreter could learn about what a speaker means is all there is to learn[.]" (D. Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge," in E. LePore (ed.), *Truth and Interpretation: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson*

Many philosophers would agree with this sweeping statement. However, as soon as one tries to spell out the slogan 'meaning is use' in a more precise manner, consensus falters. One particularly controversial point is how to understand the very notion of *use*. Quine himself advocates a behaviourist construal, according to which the public employment of language must be accounted for in terms of the emission of sounds and marks from human organisms situated in a physical environment. The result is a dispositionalist view of meaning according to which "there is no justification for collating linguistic meanings, unless in terms of men's dispositions to respond overtly to socially observable stimulations." So-called logical or conceptual connections between sentences, Quine argues, "must finally be due to the conditioning of sentences as responses to sentences as stimuli."[6]

A natural reaction to such linguistic behaviourism is to say that it fails to do justice to our established notions of meaningful speech and linguistic competence. Surely, one wishes to say, ordinary meaning-ascriptions are not equivalent to behaviourist accounts of how people are conditioned to respond to certain stimuli! However, as a criticism of Quine, this natural response is somewhat off the mark. In fact, Quine himself would agree that our established notion of linguistic significance cannot be exhaustively characterised in behaviourist terms. However, he does not consider this an objection to his behaviourism. For his intent is not to give a faithful account of our pre-scientific notion of meaning. He classifies his aim as ontological rather than conceptual: he wants to understand to what extent this ordinary notion corresponds to anything real. And, since Quine assumes that the true structure of reality is best limned by natural science, he is content with a naturalistic *ersatz* for our pre-scientific notion. Indeed, Quine's way of elaborating the slogan 'meaning is use' leads to his explicitly denouncing our ordinary talk of propositional attitudes (constructions such as 'says that...', 'means that...',

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(Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 315.) A useful discussion of the development of this idea in Quine's philosophy is D. Føllesdal, 'In What Sense Is Language Public?', in P. Leonardi and M. Santambrogio (eds.). *On Quine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). A detailed critical exposition of different versions of the claim that meaning is public is F. Stjernberg, *The Public Nature of Meaning* (Stockholm: Stockholm University, 1991).
[6] W.V.O. Quine, *Word and Object* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960), pp. xi and 11.

'believes that...') as an "essentially dramatic idiom" which has no substantial role to play in a strictly objective description of the real world.[7]

However, not everyone who subscribes to the dictum 'meaning is use' approves of Quine's scientistic revival of the metaphysical-ontological endeavour. Some philosophers construe the dictum, not as a proposal for a naturalistic meaning-surrogate, but as a starting-point for an account that is at least tolerably faithful to how we normally speak of linguistic significance. For such philosophers, to give an account of meaning in terms of use is not to purge ordinary meaning-talk of all allegedly non-scientific dross. Rather, the idea is to do justice to our established conception of linguistic meaning, as it is given before such extensive purging or revising.

Most philosophers engaged in this sort of inquiry seem to agree that if an account of meaning in terms of use is to have any chance of being successful, it must proceed from a conception of 'use' that is considerably richer than Quine's behaviourist notion. But richer in what way? A common strategy is to conceive language use in *normative* terms. According to such a normative conception, to use language is not merely to exhibit certain more or less regular patterns of behaviour, but to participate in an activity in which some behaviours are counted as *wrong* and other as *correct*, an activity which involves not just the possibility of statistically deviant behaviour but also of genuine error. In contrast to Quine, knowing what an expression means is thought of, not just as a matter of being disposed to utter the expression under such-and-such circumstances, but as a matter of grasping how the expression *should* be employed. "Meaning", argues Crispin Wright,

> is normative. To know the meaning of an expression is to know, perhaps unreflectively, how to appraise uses of it; it is to know a set of constraints to which correct uses must conform. Accordingly, to give the meaning of a statement is to describe such constraints; nothing has a claim to be regarded as an account of a statement's meaning which does not succeed in doing so.[8]

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[7] Quine (1960), p. 219. In other words, Quine construes 'meaning is use' not as a conceptual remark, but as a way of extracting what is objective in pre-scientific talk of meanings. Hence, in scientific contexts, he thinks we should simply substitute the notion of meaning with the notion of linguistic behaviour: "we can take the behavior, the use, and let the meaning go." (W. V. O. Quine, *Theories and Things* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 46.)
[8] C. Wright, *Realism, Meaning and Truth*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), p. 24.

Similarly, Robert Brandom claims that uses of language are to be characterized in a way that

> makes essential use of *normative* vocabulary. The practices that confer propositional and other sorts of conceptual content implicitly contain norms concerning how it is *correct* to use expressions, under what circumstances it is *appropriate* to perform various speech acts, and what the *appropriate* consequences of such performances are.[9]

Similar formulations are abundant. According to Michael Dummett, "if there cease to be right and wrong uses of a word, the word loses its meaning"; John McDowell and Philip Pettit claim, "[t]o mean something by a word, one must regard oneself as responsible to a norm"; and so on and so forth.[10] The list could easily be made longer.

A more difficult task, however, is to specify what the notion of 'normativity' amounts to in contexts such as these. In fact, among philosophers who subscribe to the general claim that meaning is normative, there is little agreement about what, exactly, the alleged normativity is supposed to involve. One rather frequent suggestion, however, is that normativity is somehow to be understood in terms of *rule-following*. The claim, then, is that meaningful speech consists in the following of rules that specify what constitutes correct linguistic behaviour. Explaining what a linguistic expression means is seen as a matter of stating the rules that identify the correct employment of that expression; learning to speak is construed as acquiring the ability to suit one's linguistic behaviour to such rules of usage; and so forth.[11]

Such a conception of linguistic normativity is often ascribed to Wittgenstein. According to Peter Hacker, when Wittgenstein speaks of the use of an expression, he means

> not merely the verbal behaviour of users of the expression, but their verbal and other behaviour *in so far as it accords with the acknowledged rules for the correct employment of that expression*, rules which the users themselves acknowledge in their humdrum explanations of meaning and of what they mean and in their recognition of explanations by others of what certain expressions mean. [...] From the point of view of a normative (rule-governed) conception of meaning and language such as Wittgenstein defends, a behaviourist conception like Quine's is simply no conception of meaning at all, not even an ersatz one. Indeed, it is no conception of *language*, for a language stripped of normativity is no more language than chess stripped of its rules is a game.[12]

Tim Thornton and Hans-Johann Glock give similar accounts of Wittgenstein's position:

> Linguistic meaning has a normative dimension in that words can be used correctly and incorrectly. For any particular use of a word that has a meaning, it can be asked whether it has been used correctly or not. [...] The correct (and incorrect) applications are determined by the rule or rules that prescribe its correct use.[13]

> Wittgenstein continued to insist that linguistic understanding involves mastery of techniques concerning the *application of rules*, and to stress the link between grammatical rules and meaning. Finally, he maintained that "following according to the rule is FUNDAMENTAL to our language game". [...] Wittgenstein not only stressed the normative aspects of language, but showed, against empiricist reductionism, that they are crucial to the very possibility of meaningful discourse.[14]

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[9] R. B. Brandom, 'Précis of *Making It Explicit*', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 57 (1997), p. 153. Original emphases. Cf. R. B. Brandom, *Making It Explicit* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), *passim*.

[10] M. Dummett, *The Logical Basis of Metaphysics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 85. J. McDowell and P. Pettit, 'Introduction', in McDowell and Pettit (eds.), *Subject, Thought and Context* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 10.

[11] It should be noticed, however, that some philosophers think the relevant notion of normativity cannot be spelled out in terms of rule-following, since, they argue, the notion of rule-following presupposes the notion of correctness. Cf., e.g., P. A. Boghossian, 'The Rule-Following Considerations', *Mind* 98 (1989): 507-549, at pp. 516-517, and Brandom (1994) *passim*.

[12] P.M.S. Hacker, *Wittgenstein's Place in Twentieth-Century Analytic Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 208-211. Original emphases, note omitted.

[13] T. Thornton, *Wittgenstein on Language and Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), pp. 31f.

[14] H-J. Glock, 'Necessity and Normativity', in H. Sluga and D. G. Stern (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 223. Original emphases, references omitted. The quotation that occurs within this passage is from L. Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Foundation of Mathematics*, 3rd ed., eds. G. E. M. Anscombe, R. Rhees and G. H. von Wright, transl. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978), VI-28.

The present book is not an exegetical study of Wittgenstein's philosophy. My aim is not to decide whether Hacker, Thornton and Glock give adequate accounts of Wittgenstein's actual viewpoint. Rather, my purpose is to consider and scrutinise the general idea that meaning is, in some sense, a matter of rules, and try to clarify what, if anything, can sensibly be made of this idea. In particular, I wish to reflect on why this idea might be of philosophical significance. Since the conception of meaning as a matter of rules is embraced, in one form or another, by a large number of different thinkers, I intend my discussion to be of interest not only to those directly concerned with (or inspired by) Wittgenstein's treatment of language and rules, but to anyone puzzled about the place of rules and normativity in language.[15]

One immediate problem is that the notion of 'rule' is not very much clearer than the notion of 'normativity'. In considering whether meaning is a matter of rules, one cannot simply assume that there exists an intuitively obvious idea of what kind of creatures 'rules' are. Rather, a central and integral part of the investigation will have to be to clarify what rules of the relevant sort are supposed to be like. The present chapter is intended as a first step towards such clarification. Let me emphasize that my considerations here are to be regarded as preparatory sketches, many of which will be more carefully elaborated in later chapters.

Although this is not an exegetical work, I begin, in the next section, by reflecting on two opposite ways of reading Wittgenstein. One sort of reading is illustrated by the three passages from Hacker, Thornton and Glock quoted above. The opposite kind of interpretation claims, by contrast, that the later Wittgenstein actually *rejects* the notion that meaning requires rules. I discuss different ways of understanding this conflict, and uses it as a kind of background against which I outline my own way of approaching the issue of meaning and rules.

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[15] I do not wish to give the impression that there are no important differences between Hacker's, Thornton's and Glock's readings of Wittgenstein. To be sure, there are. Nor do I suggest that every philosopher who claim that meaning is a matter of rules is in agreement with the views ascribed to Wittgenstein by these three commentators. What I am discussing here is only the general, unrefined suggestion that meaning is, in some yet-to-be specified sense, a matter of rule-following. Needless to say, this general idea has been elaborated in very different ways by different thinkers – often enough in ways that are clearly incompatible with each other.

In section 1.3, the actual investigation begins. I give a number of concrete examples of rules of usage, and discuss their character. Thereafter, in 1.4, I submit a first, preliminary formulation of a central point to which I will return again and again in later chapters, namely, what I call *the primacy of meaningful expression*. The point is that rules of usage cannot settle beforehand what words can and cannot be used to express. What comes *first* is the fact that something is being said; the rules serve only as posterior registrations of the expressed meaning. In 1.5, I tie this to the issue of rules and normativity. I ask in what sense rules of usage determine what speakers should and should not do. My conclusion is that the normative-prescriptive employment of such rules is *irrelevant* to the distinction between meaningful and meaningless speech, and that the connection between rules and meaning has rather to do with the fact that rules *describe* (and can be used to distinguish between) various forms of language use. In section 1.6., I discuss at some length the philosophical significance of rules, by considering the structure of some philosophical confusions. I end by summarising the main points of the chapter.

1.2. Approaching the Issue of Meaning and Rules

One of the most confusing things about reading the *Philosophical Investigations* and other later writings of Wittgenstein, is that his treatment of language and meaning appears to involve at least two conflicting tendencies. On the one hand, he frequently talks of meaning in terms of rules; and this easily gives the impression that he conceives rule-following as a necessary ingredient in all meaningful speech. The above quotations from Hacker, Thornton and Glock suffice to indicate that this impression need not be conditioned by a superficial reading. To the contrary, it is regarded by some of the most distinguished Wittgenstein commentators as basically correct. They all formulate Wittgenstein's alleged viewpoint in quite general terms, speaking of *any* language, of *any* use of a word, and of *the very possibility* of meaningful discourse.

But there is also another, equally strong and yet incompatible view, namely, that the later Wittgenstein is highly sceptical of *any* attempt to say what meaningful language is necessarily like. He often emphasises the unlimited

diversity of types of meaningful discourse, and explicitly denies that we apply the term 'language' only to things that share certain essential characteristics:

> Instead of producing something common to all that we call language, I am saying that these phenomena have *no one* thing in common which makes us use the same word for all, – but that they are *related* to one another in many different ways.[16]

In fact, some commentators have argued that Wittgenstein actually *rejects* the idea that linguistic meaning requires rules. "That everyday language does not, in fact or in essence, depend upon such a structure and conception of rules, and yet that the absence of such a structure in no way impairs its functioning, is," says Stanley Cavell, "what the picture of language drawn in the later philosophy is all about." According to Cavell, Wittgenstein's discussions of rules and language are meant to "indicate how inessential the 'appeal to rules' is as an explanation of language."[17] Similarly, Richard Eldridge says that, according to Wittgenstein, "there presumably are no necessary truths about either language or linguistic behavior", and, indeed, that Wittgenstein's conception is "thoroughly at odds with the notion that all uses of language are necessarily rule-governed."[18]

It is difficult to decide which, if any, of these different readings is the correct one. Again, Wittgenstein's writings are far from unequivocal on this point. A good example is the sentence from the *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* which Glock quotes in the passage cited above: "Following according to the rule is FUNDAMENTAL to our language game." To begin with, one might notice that 'our language game' is not the same as 'any language' or 'the very possibility of meaningful discourse'. Hence, Glock's taking this sentence as evidence that Wittgenstein thinks meaning without rule-following is impossible may not seem entirely warranted. On the other hand, the quoted sentence is indeed surrounded by statements where Wittgenstein says that rule-following "characterizes what we call describing" and "is the procedure on which we build all judging."[19] So, isn't Glock's reading correct,

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[16] Wittgenstein (1958), §65. First emphasis added.
[17] S. Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?* (New York: Scribner's, 1969), pp. 48 and 52.
[18] R. Eldridge, 'The Normal and the Normative: Wittgenstein's Legacy, Kripke, and Cavell', in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 46 (1986), p. 563.
[19] Wittgenstein (1978), VI-28.

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after all? Not necessarily. The later Wittgenstein often emphasizes that descriptive language is not the only, or even the primary, sort of language use. Hence, even if he says that rule-following characterizes what we call description, this does not imply that he would agree that any form of meaningful discourse must involve the following of rules. More importantly, categorical statements of the sort exemplified by the sentence Glock quotes are usually avoided in Wittgenstein's most carefully worked out manuscript from his later period, the *Philosophical Investigations* (part 1). There are reasons to believe that the quoted sentence, as well as the surrounding remarks, are overstatements that Wittgenstein would have qualified or even deleted in later revisions.

Another difficulty is that the conflict between these seemingly opposite interpretations of Wittgenstein is not as simple and head-on as the brief review given above suggests. For, on closer inspection, there appear to be important terminological differences between the commentators mentioned. In particular, it is by no means clear that they all mean the same thing by 'rule'. For example, there are passages which suggest that what Cavell has in mind is something more or less similar to the fixed rules of a formal calculus.[20] By contrast, Hacker emphasizes that rules of the relevant sort "are not of course axioms or postulates of a formal system", but

> may take the form of ostensive definitions, many by reference to paradigmatic samples which are to be used as standards for the correct application of the *definiendum*. They may take the form of synonyms (precise or rough and ready), or of exemplification ('Running is doing *this*', 'Hitting is *this*'), or of a series of examples (with a similarity rider) which are to be taken as a rule, or of paraphrase or contrastive paraphrase.[21]

Indeed, Hacker argues that rules of the relevant sort need not be formulated at all, since "the forms of guidance by a rule are most varied; it is not at all

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[20] Cavell's most detailed discussion of rules in Wittgenstein's philosophy is to be found in his 'The Availability of Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy' (in Cavell (1969)), which is a critical review of David Pole's book, *The Later Philosophy of Wittgenstein* (London: The Athlone Press, 1958). Cavell's primary target is Pole's implausibly formalistic conception of rules, and, even if Cavell's Wittgenstein seems sceptical also of less formalistic attempts to account for meaning in terms of rules, it is not at all obvious how to generalize his critical objections.
[21] Hacker (1996), pp. 208f. Note omitted; original emphases.

necessary that for an activity to be guided by a rule the rule should enter into the activity or even cross the minds of those engaged in it [...]."[22]

All in all, if there is more than a merely terminological conflict between Hacker's and Cavell's readings of Wittgenstein, it is quite difficult to say exactly wherein it consists. I will not try to perform that difficult task here, but only try to indicate what seems to me to be a central point of disagreement.[23]

The claim that meaning requires rules can be understood in at least two different ways. One way is to conceive it as the proposed result of a conceptual analysis. Somewhat like, say, calling a geometrical figure 'square' means to imply that the figure has four sides, ascribing meaning to a word is supposed to imply that using the word involves the following of certain rules. This claim, however, is quite obscure and by no means self-evident. Indeed, it is difficult to see how the existence of the proposed conceptual interconnection is to be vindicated at all. Of course, one might trivialise it by a legislative manoeuvre, i.e., by inventing special notions of 'meaning' and 'rule' which are so defined that wherever there is something called 'linguistic meaning' there are things called 'rules'. I suppose, however, that this is not what thinkers like Hacker, Thornton and Glock have in mind. After all, they seem to regard the notion that meaningful speech requires rules as some sort of genuine insight on Wittgenstein's part.

On the other hand, one might also ask: what would a *refutation* of the claim that the notions of 'meaning' and 'rule' are conceptually interconnected in the above sense look like? At first sight, this may seem like a simpler question. It may appear as if all we have to do to refute such a claim is to find

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[22] G. P. Baker and P. M. S. Hacker, *Wittgenstein: Rules, Grammar and Necessity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), p. 45. Not that Hacker's (and Baker's) notion of 'rule' is infinitely flexible. Against the notion of 'rule' that figures in transformational-generative linguistics, he argues that "[r]ules which no one cites in explanations of the correct thing to do, which no one refers to in justifying what he has done or in criticizing others who have acted incorrectly, which need high-powered philosophers and linguists to discover them, and which, once formulated, are unintelligible to most people who allegedly follow then, are indeed dubious objects." (G. P. Baker and P. M. S. Hacker, *Scepticism, Rules and Language* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), p. ix.)
[23] For a more detailed discussion of the differences between Cavell's and Baker's-and-Hacker's readings of Wittgenstein, cf. Steven G. Affeldt, 'The Ground of Mutuality: Criteria, Judgment, and Intelligibility in Stephen Mulhall and Stanley Cavell', *European Journal of Philosophy* 6 (1998), and S. Mulhall, 'The Givenness of Grammar: A Reply to Steven Affeldt', *European Journal of Philosophy* 6 (1998).

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a counterexample; i.e., to remind ourselves of some particular case that, once clearly exhibited, we would not hesitate to classify as 'meaningful' even if nothing that might plausibly be called a 'rule' is present.

The problem is that if the proposed notion of 'rule' is broad and flexible enough, the prospects of finding such counterexamples are dim. For example, given Hacker's generous explanation of what may constitute a rule of usage, it will probably be possible for him to neutralise any alleged counterexample; and yet, since his notion of a rule is not explicitly defined in terms of meaning – indeed, he frequently emphasises that the search for a determinate definition of "our humdrum concept of a rule" is misdirected, since "[t]here are no common features to all the things we call 'rules' *in virtue of which* we denominate them thus"[24] – it is at least not obvious that these neutralisations will beg the question. Hence, to the extent that the conflict between the different viewpoints ascribed to Wittgenstein by the above commentators is a conflict over the conceptual relation between the notions of 'meaning' and 'rule', it seems to end up in a deadlock.

There is, however, a more interesting way of conceiving the notion that meaning 'requires' rules; a way which, I suggest, takes us closer to the core of the conflict. One problem, however, is that this second notion of 'requirement' is even more obscure than the first. Let me try, nonetheless, to indicate what I have in mind.

Consider the following passages, by Hacker and his fellow commentator Gordon Baker:

> Wittgenstein's 'rules of grammar' serve only to *distinguish sense from nonsense*. [...] They *settle what makes sense*, experience settles what is the case. [...] Grammar is a free-floating array of rules for the use of language. It *determines what is a correct use of language*, but is not itself correct or incorrect.[25]

> What philosophers have called 'necessary truths' are, in Wittgenstein's view, typically rules of grammar, norms of representation, i.e. they *fix concepts*. They are expressions of internal relations between concepts [...]. Hence they *license (or*

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[24] Baker and Hacker (1985), pp. 44 and 43. Original emphasis, note omitted.
[25] Baker and Hacker (1985), p. 40. All emphases added.

prohibit) transitions between concepts, i.e. transitions from one expression of an empirical proposition to another.[26]

On reading passages such as these – and there are many other, similar passages in Hacker's writings on Wittgenstein – it is difficult to avoid the impression that Hacker's Wittgenstein conceives the possibilities of meaningful expression as, in some sense, *limited* by rules. Once the rules have been set up, they *fix* what words mean, and thereby *constrain* what those words can be used to express. They also *license* certain inferences and word-combinations, and *prohibit* others. The suggestion seems to be that, in virtue of this constraining role, the rules infuse words with normative significance and, thus, ensure their meaningfulness.

One might compare this with Cavell's claim: "Grammar cannot, or ought not, of itself dictate what you mean, what it is up to you to say."[27] The contrast, although far from entirely clear, is nonetheless genuine. And it is perhaps this contrast which constitutes the really interesting disagreement between these different readings of Wittgenstein. Thus, Hacker's Wittgenstein seems to claim that meaning requires rules in the sense that linguistic significance arises because rules dictate what speakers are allowed and not allowed to do; whereas Cavell's Wittgenstein wants to combat precisely that sort of conception.

Again, this conflict, if it is a substantial conflict, is extremely difficult to pin down. I bring it up just as a sort of opening to my own discussions below. My discussions will concern the relation between rules and linguistic meaning, and I will repeatedly return to the question whether meanings are, in any important sense, 'settled' or 'determined' by rules. I hope that these considerations will make clear that using words such as 'determine', 'fix', 'license', and so forth, to describe the relation between rules and the meaningful use of language is, at best, misleading.

This does not imply that what I will say below is wholly congenial to the viewpoint that Cavell finds in Wittgenstein. In Cavell's work (on Wittgenstein's philosophy as well as on other topics), there is little talk of language and

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[26] Baker and Hacker (1985), p. 269. All emphases added, except from the first occurrence of the word 'concepts'.

[27] S. Cavell, *Themes Out of School: Effects and Causes* (San Fransisco: North Point Press, 1984), p. 45. Quoted in Affeldt (1998), p. 1.

meaning in terms of rules, except as an object of criticism. By contrast, I will not hesitate to formulate rules of usage, and even claim that, in many cases, such rules capture at least part of what words mean. It seems to me that once one lays aside the aspiration to provide something like a general conceptual analysis of the notion of 'meaning', or an explanation, in terms of rules, of how meaning arises, there is often nothing wrong with conceiving certain cases of language use in terms of rules. One can allow oneself to speak of meaning in terms of rules *with regard to particular cases*, without thereby committing oneself to the claim that language as a whole must constitute a thoroughly regularised structure or activity. I hope to show that conceiving meaning in terms of rules is, in many cases, quite appropriate and useful (provided, of course, that the notion of 'rule' is adequately understood); and that there is no reason why one should not allow oneself to adopt such a useful conception.

Before starting the actual investigation, let me add a word of warning. Philosophers have claimed to find all kinds of rules in language: syntactical rules, semantical rules, pragmatic rules of conversation, deep-grammatical rules, and so on. In what follows, I ask the reader not to be too eager to classify the examples of rules which I will give into any such category. For example, it is an important feature of the rules I use as examples that they are neither 'syntactic' nor 'semantic', as these terms are commonly understood today (cf. chapter 2, section 2.8.). If one tries to force them into any one of these categories, one will inevitably get a distorted conception of the points I try to make. If there is any 'category' to which the rules belong, it is, I think, the one Wittgenstein called 'grammatical'. However, since my task is not Wittgenstein exegesis, I will not use that label. Rather, I will simply speak of 'rules of usage'.

1.3. Meaning and Rule-Following – Some Introductory Examples

Suppose I work as a school teacher. During a lesson in geography, I inform my pupils about the length of various famous rivers. For example, I tell them

(1) The Nile River is 6670 kilometres long.

This statement is true. It describes the actual length of the Nile River.[28] By contrast, if I had said,

(2) The Nile River is 5464 kilometres long,

I would have said something false, and misinformed the class.

Now, let us contrast (1) and (2) with the following construction:

(3) The Nile River is a fortnight long.

As it stands, it is not clear what, if anything, this sequence of words means. However, one can easily imagine circumstances under which it would be straightforwardly understood. Consider, for example, a group of adventurers who discuss how long time it would take to travel by speedboat along various famous waterways. One says, 'The Rhine should take about 4 or 5 days'; another, 'The Rio Grande requires longer time, at least a week'; and, a third, 'The Nile River is a fortnight long'.

It seems natural to say that the difference between (1) and (3) is not of the same kind as the difference between (1) and (2). In both (1) and (2), the length of the Nile River is conceived in *spatial* terms. Hence, (1) and (2) contradict each other: they cannot both be true at the same time. By contrast, unless 'fortnight' has been given some special, spatial sense, (3) does not aspire to describe the spatial length of the Nile River. (3) means something else – if it means anything at all, that is to say.

If one likes, one may describe this contrast in terms of rules. One might say that the teacher who utters (1) or (2) in front of his class follows the rule,

(R1) The length of a river is specified in spatial terms.

By contrast, except in a case where the word 'fortnight' has been given some new, spatial sense, someone who utters (3) does not follow this rule. If he follows any rules at all, they are different; if one likes, the 'game' he plays is

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[28] At least according to the Swedish National Encyclopaedia, *Nationalencyklopedin* , 20 vols. (Stockholm: Bra Böcker, 1989-1996).

not the same as that played by the teacher. For example, the imagined adventurers follow the rule

(R2) The length of a river is specified in terms of how long time it would take to travel along the river by speedboat.

Let me point out some important things about this way of talking about meaning and rules. First of all, the proposed distinction between following and not following rules like (R1) or (R2) is *not* the same as the distinction between saying something true and saying something false. As (R1) is intended to be understood, I follow the rule (R1) both when I make the true statement (1) *and* when I make the false statement (2). Indeed, my following the same rule in both these cases shows itself precisely in the fact that at least one of those statements must be false. Similarly, the adventurer's statement, 'The Nile River is a fortnight long', may well turn out to be false. Perhaps he is grossly underestimating how long time it would take to cover the whole Nile River by speedboat. However, even if the truth-value of his statement remains to be decided, it is nonetheless clear that he follows the rule (R2), as this rule is intended to be understood.

One reason why I emphasise this is that, in the contemporary philosophical discussion of meaning and rule-following, one often finds the idea that saying something false is not to follow but to *violate* some acknowledged rule of usage. According to this kind of conception, a rule for the use of an expression is something the following of which requires that one applies the expression truthfully. Thus, the falsity of my statement (2) would imply that I break a rule of usage. Or, to take another example: to the extent that there are rules for the use of the expression 'member of Parliament', those rules are violated by someone who says, falsely, about the philosopher Michael Dummett, 'Michael Dummett is a member of Parliament'. And so forth.[29]

The notion of rule-following that I propose here is fundamentally different. As I will speak of rules, someone who says, 'Michael Dummett is a member of Parliament', *follows* the rules for the normal use of the expression

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[29] Cf. e.g., S. Blackburn, 'The Individual Strikes Back', *Synthese* 58 (1984): 281-301; G. Ebbs, *Rule-Following and Realism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); Thornton (1998).

'member of Parliament' as much as someone who says, truthfully, 'Tony Blair is a member of Parliament'. Again, the relevant contrast is not between true and false statements, but between statements such as the two just given and, say, a construction like 'Fermat's last theorem is a member of Parliament'. Unless the term 'Fermat's last theorem' is used in some special, extraordinary sense – say, as the code name for a Russian spy working in England – the expression 'member of Parliament', as it occurs in this construction, is not used in accordance with the rules that capture its standard employment.

Consequently, I would say that there is a distinction between, on the one hand, the question of whether a certain rule of usage is followed, and, on the other hand, the question of whether a statement is true or false. If one likes, one may call the former sort of question 'conceptual' or (to use Wittgenstein's term) 'grammatical', and the latter 'empirical' or 'factual'. However, let me immediately add that I do not maintain that there is any general principle according to which this distinction can be drawn in all particular cases, or that it can always be drawn sharply. On the contrary, the difference between saying something false and changing one's usage is often blurry and indeterminate.

This sort of blurriness can be illustrated by reflecting a little further on the geography lesson imagined at the beginning of this section. Again, I teach my pupils the length of various rivers; and, in doing so, I might be said to follow the rule 'The length of a river is specified in spatial terms'. However, this rule must not be understood in an overly formalistic manner. It is important to notice that not any term that would be classified as 'spatial' according to some formal external criteria, would constitute a possible specification of the length of a river. Consider, for example, the following construction:

(4) The Nile River is 3 millimetres long.

While the falsehood 'The Nile River is 5464 kilometres long' is straightforwardly incompatible with the true statement 'The Nile River is 6670 kilometres long', (4) makes sense only as a move in a quite different game. Perhaps 'The Nile River' is not used to speak of the real Nile River, but of how it is depicted on a certain miniature map; or, perhaps the word 'millimetre' is not used in its normal sense. In any case, it is clear that such employment

deviates, in *some* way, from my use of those expressions when I, as a teacher, inform my pupils about the length of the Nile River. If the one uttering this sentence is playing any game at all, it is different from the one I play in the classroom.

But now, what if the stated length is gradually increased? What about constructions such as 'The Nile River is 3 metres long', 'The Nile River is 30 metres long', 'The Nile River is 3 kilometres long'... ? At what point does it become conceivable that what we have is a piece of non-deviant usage, analogous to the straightforward falsehood, 'The Nile River is 5464 kilometers long'? When does the construction start expressing something that is indeed incompatible with the true statement, 'The Nile River is 6670 kilometers long'? Obviously, these questions have no determinate answer. There is a considerable grey zone here, in which the distinction between deviant language use and empirical falsehood is blurry.

In other words: given the way I use language when I inform my pupils about the length of various rivers, the following sentence:

The Nile River is longer than 3 millimetres

does not express an empirical statement about the Nile River. Rather, it captures an aspect of how the expressions 'The Nile River is ... long' and '3 millimetres' function. It formulates, one might say, yet another rule of the 'game' that I play. By contrast, the sentence

The Nile River is longer than 3000 kilometres

expresses an empirical, or factual, truth; it describes a real feature of the Nile River. However, there are many constructions in between these two, the classification of which is just not decided. Does

The Nile River is longer than 300 metres

formulate a rule of usage, or does it state an empirical fact? There is, as far as I can see, no answer. What we have here is a case where the distinction between rules of usage and empirical statements gains no foothold.

However, that a distinction is blurry does not imply that it is illusory, or philosophically insignificant. To be sure, there are plenty of borderline cases. But, as I have already illustrated, there are also many cases that are not borderline. Such cases suffice to justify the distinction, as I conceive it.[30]

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[30] In post-war philosophy of language, distinctions like those between rules of usage and factual statements, or between conceptual and empirical investigations, has fallen into disrepute, largely due to Quine's influential criticism of the analytic/synthetic distinction. Quine claims, not just that there are borderline cases which cannot be neatly fit into such categories, but that distinctions such as these cannot be given a satisfactory clarification at all, and, hence, make no sense. It is by no means clear, however, that Quine's arguments are as forceful as they are often taken to be. In fact, there are reasons to suspect that his requirements for a 'satisfactory clarification' beg many of the relevant questions. For example, he requires that a satisfactory clarification of notions such as 'analyticity', 'synonymy', 'definition', and the like, should consist not just in an account of how such notions are interrelated to each other, but in a *non-intensional* explication, "presumably in terms relating to linguistic behaviour." (*From a Logical Point of View*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961), p. 24.) However, it is doubtful that those who have made use of the distinctions that Quine's wishes to obliterate have assumed that those distinctions can be cashed out in terms of what Quine would count as 'linguistic behaviour' (remember, Quine works with a quite restricted, behaviourist notion of 'behaviour'). Apparently, one must accept Quine's more or less behaviourist starting-point in order to accept his arguments. But why should one do that?

Quine also brings holistic considerations into his discussion of analyticity. It should be observed, however, that the holistic character of scientific theories does not, in itself, imply the sort of obliteration Quine envisages. For example, Pierre Duhem's version of holism (which Quine refers to as a predecessor) has no such implications. What Duhem argues is simply that, in physics, experimental predictions are derived, not from individual theoretical hypotheses but from great conjunctions of such hypotheses. Among these hypotheses are *not* supposed to be what has traditionally been counted as 'analytical' or 'conceptual' or 'logical' statements, but only 'synthetic' or 'empirical' hypotheses of physics. (Cf. P. Duhem, *The Aim and Structure of Physical Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), esp. ch. 6.) This is, I take it, an undeniably true version of holism, but one which does not have the sort of consequences that Quine wishes to draw. By contrast, Quine's version of holism is much more radical and, I think, implausible. According to Quine, not only physical hypotheses, but also statements that philosophers have traditionally classified as 'analytical' or 'conceptual' statements, belong to the conjunction in question. Allegedly, the latter statements are "simply certain further statements of the system, certain further elements of the field." (Quine (1961), p. 42) This seems to be a radicalisation that Quine must make in order to cast suspicion on the analytic/synthetic-distinction. However, the result is a version of holism that seems difficult to make very credible. Whereas Duhem's version is easily illustrated by concrete examples from the history of physics, it is difficult to see how Quine's conception, as stated above, is to be vindicated at all. In effect, what Quine seems to suggest is that we start viewing scientific activity from a new, peculiar perspective, in which notions such as 'experience' and 'inference' are conceived in more or less behaviourist terms. He asks us to conceive experiences as stimuli which cause us to abandon certain sentences and embrace others, and to view inferential practice as a matter of being disposed to react in certain ways to such stimuli. According to Quine, empirical

1.4. Rules and the Primacy of Meaningful Expression

Some readers may feel confused by my way of talking about rules in the previous section. What, exactly, is it that these rules are supposed to do? Apparently, the rule 'The length of a river is specified in spatial terms' has something to do with what we usually mean by expressions of the form 'The (river) … is … long'. Still, it does not look like an ordinary *semantic* rule, for it seems to be concerned with purely intra-linguistic relationships. I.e., it seems to be concerned with the well-formedness of sentences, rather than with connections between language and extra-linguistic reality. Should we conclude, then, that it is after all a *syntactical* rule which specifies the combinatorial possibilities of words without taking meanings into consideration? But if so, how can the rule serve to make *conceptual* distinctions of the kind described above?

The discussion of these questions will have to await chapter 2. In the present section, I want to raise another, though not wholly unrelated trouble. To see the trouble, consider some further examples of what I would characterise as rules of usage:

(R3) Black is darker than grey.
(R4) Mathematical theorems cannot be members of parliament.
(R5) The length of a musical performance is specified in temporal terms.

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statements are more germane to experience than logical laws: "But in this relation of 'germaneness' I envisage nothing more than a loose association reflecting the relative likelihood, in practice, of our choosing one statement rather than another for revision in the event of recalcitrant experience." (Quine (1961), p. 43)

Quine has later proposed what may be a more moderate version of holism, according to which logical relations of inference are exempt from revision. (Cf., e.g., *Pursuit of Truth*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 13ff.) A consequence of this moderation is that it becomes much more difficult to see why holism would stand in conflict with the possibility of making distinctions such as the one between the conceptual and the empirical, or between analytic and synthetic statements.

There is more to say about this, of course. A satisfactory treatment of Quine's criticism would require a much longer discussion than there is room for here. It is an issue to which I hope to return elsewhere.

Reflecting on these examples (as well as on the examples given in the previous section), one might feel uncomfortable about the fact that the alleged rules are stated in ways that make *use* of the very expressions the employment of which they are supposed to capture. Would it not be better if those expressions were only *mentioned*? For example, instead of 'Black is darker than grey', should we not say, 'From premises of the form "x is black" and "y is grey" follows "x is darker than y"'? And so on.

There is an important truth in this objection. 'Black is darker than grey' looks similar to an ordinary factual statement such as 'Michael's shirt is darker than Peter's'. This similarity may mislead one to think that the former statement does not formulate a rule of usage, but describes some sort of necessarily obtaining relation between two strange entities, *black* and *grey*. Reformulating it along the lines suggested above might be a way of avoiding such a misconception. Similarly, 'Mathematical theorems cannot be members of Parliament' makes it sound as if Fermat's last theorem and its peers were somehow *prevented* from becoming members of Parliament (by law, or by lack of political talent). But this is an illusion: the 'cannot' signifies that what is stated is a rule for the use of certain expressions.

However, the suggestion that the rules should be formulated in a way that mentions rather than uses the relevant expressions is not unproblematic. For, the 'mentioning' of linguistic expressions is often conceived as a way of, as it were, *detaching* those expressions from their meaningful use. Thus, in a representative passage, Paul Horwich says the name of a linguistic expression "picks out a type of phonological object [...]. The types with whose meanings we are concerned are identified solely on the basis of their shape or sound (or some analogous feature)."[31] According to this sort of conception, to mention linguistic expressions means to treat them as units that are only externally related to their real-life employment. In fact, approaching language from such a perspective is very common among philosophers of language. It is an approach which characterises formal semantics, as that discipline was developed in the 30's and 40's by Alfred Tarski, Rudolf Carnap and others. Thus, Carnap says a semantic theory individuates the expressions of the object-language in terms of their "sign-design", so that two concrete "sign-events" are

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[31] P. Horwich, *Meaning* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 14.

treated as instances of the same expression if they have "similar geometrical shape".[32] Likewise, Tarski's truth-definition makes use of "structural-descriptive names" whose mode of designation serves to identify expressions as mere concatenations of letters.[33] Even if there exist many different varieties and refinements of this sort of approach, its basic feature – i.e., the externalization of the relation between expressions and their meaningful use – also permeates contemporary meaning-theoretical discussions, including the central works of Davidson and Dummett.[34]

If *this* is the sense in which rules of usage are supposed to 'mention' the expressions whose use they capture, then such rules will be understood as prescriptions for the use of independently individuated orthographic or phonological units. The rules will be seen as organizing an intrinsically inert raw material of shapes and sounds, by determining which employments of that material are correct and which are incorrect. The function of the rules will be seen as that of imposing external criteria of well-formedness, interchangeability, legitimate inference, and so forth, on a set of already identified linguistic elements.

However, this way of conceiving rules of usage makes it utterly unclear why those rules would have anything to do with the distinction between meaningful and meaningless speech. For *what words can be used to express is not delimited by rules*. To be sure, it is true that the rule 'The length of a river is specified in spatial terms' captures an established way of talking. But this fact

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[32] R. Carnap, *Introduction to Semantics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1946), p. 7.

[33] A. Tarski, 'The Concept of Truth in Formalized Languages', in A. Tarski, *Logic, Semantics, Metamathematics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), pp. 156ff.

[34] Cf. D. Davidson, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984); M. Dummett, *Truth and Other Enigmas* (London: Duckworth, 1978), and *The Seas of Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993). For a critical investigation into the connections between contemporary meaning-theoretical discussions, the formal semantics of Tarski and Carnap, and Hilbert's notion of meta-mathematical *Beweistheorie*, cf. S. Stenlund, *Language and Philosophical Problems* (London: Routledge, 1990), ch. 2. Davidson and Dummett are discussed in more detail in chapter 4.
  It should be noticed that not all philosophers who approach language from this sort of perspective maintain that meaning is a matter of rules. For example, Davidson is highly sceptical of this idea. Cf., e.g., Davidson (1984), pp. 265-80, and 'A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs', in R. E. Grandy and R. Warner (eds.), *Philosophical Grounds of Rationality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

does not make a sentence such as 'The Nile River is a fortnight long' senseless. As we have seen, that sentence may well be used to describe, say, how long time it would take to travel along the Nile River by speedboat. Similarly, the existence of the rule 'Mathematical theorems cannot be members of Parliament' in no way hinders us from using 'Fermat's last theorem is a member of parliament' to describe, say, the fact that a certain Russian spy has made his way into the British Parliament. And so on.

This may seem like a minor point. In fact, it may seem entirely uncontroversial. After all, few philosophers who talk of meaning in terms of rules would deny that alternative systems of rules – alternative 'language-games' – are conceivable. Nor would they claim that any such game is, *per se*, more legitimate than any other. Soccer is neither more nor less legitimate than basketball or icehockey; and, supposedly, the same is true with respect to different ways of using language. Hence, if my point is just that different systems of rules are conceivable, then it would be more or less off the mark. However, this is *not* my point. Rather, what I claim is this. If you play a game such as soccer or basketball, the rules are fixed. In basketball, for example, one is not allowed to kick the ball. If a basketball player kicks the ball, we do not say: that's all right, he has changed to soccer. On the contrary, we say he is acting inappropriately, and the referee is supposed to call a foul. By contrast, the sort of rules the character of which I propose to clarify are, in an important sense, not fixed in this manner. They do not function as pre-established principles by means of which the meaningfulness of particular utterances can be assessed. Rather, it is the other way around. What comes *first* is the fact that something meaningful is being said. The rules serve only as *posterior descriptions* of what is expressed, and cannot determine it beforehand.

Examples of wholly unprecedented usage which are in accordance with no pre-established rules but are nonetheless immediately intelligible are frequent, not just in poetry and experimental literature but also in everyday language. Imagine, for example, Jonathan and Isabelle, who work at a printing office. Each Friday, they print posters for the weekly concert given by the town's symphony orchestra. These posters usually have the same standard format every week. However, this week's performance is an anniversary concert, and, hence, the posters are supposed to be twice as long as usual. Now, imagine that

Jonathan has forgotten about this, and starts loading the presses with papers of the shorter, standard format. Isabelle interrupts his work: 'No, no, tonight's concert is 2 yards 2 feet long'. Even if Isabelle's utterance is not in accordance with the rule 'The length of musical performances is specified in temporal terms', and even if her way of talking is not established jargon at the office, the utterance is nonetheless immediately understandable and makes perfectly good sense.

There are even more telling examples of the same phenomenon, examples that require no special contextual surroundings. Consider the following example, used by Frege:

Trieste is no Vienna.

According to established usage, 'Vienna' is a name; however, in Frege's example it functions as a concept-expression. And even if we have never heard 'Vienna' being used in this manner before, we have no difficulties recognising its new function. It is not as if we first think that 'Vienna' *must* function as a name, and, hence, that 'Triste is no Vienna' must mean something like

Trieste ≠ Vienna.

We grasp, quite immediately, the role of 'Vienna' in Frege's sentence, even if that role is entirely different from the one that the word is usually given.[35]

These examples illustrate the fact that we cannot *first* decide what rules are in force, and *then* use these rules to decide what, if anything, a given utterance or word-combination means. On the contrary, we can state the relevant rules – the rules that are 'in force' – only by way of understanding what is being said. It is not in virtue of its fulfilling some externally imposed standards of well-formedness that an utterance manages to express a certain sense. Again, what comes first is the fact that a meaning is being expressed; this

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[35] G. Frege, *Collected Papers on Mathematics, Logic, and Philosophy*, ed. B. McGuinness (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), p. 189. This example is extensively discussed in C. Diamond, *The Realistic Spirit* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), pp. 76ff., and J. Conant 'The Method of the *Tractatus*', forthcoming in E. H. Reck (ed.), *From Frege to Wittgenstein: Perspectives on Early Analytic Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 42ff.

suffices to make the utterance 'well-formed', in the relevant sense of that word. What the rules do is only to register, afterwards as it were, wherein this form of use consists.

Thus, to argue that Isabelle's utterance is ill-formed nonsense because it does not obey the established rule 'The length of a musical performance is specified in temporal terms' means to put the cart before the horse. What we should do is, rather, to note that Isabelle's utterance is meaningful and, *hence*, well-formed, and that the rule fails to capture the form of use which Isabelle's utterance instantiates.

Hence, employing rules to describe what is being said is quite different from treating them as external standards of well-formedness imposed on a previously given raw material of sounds and shapes. Conceived as descriptions, rules treat linguistic expressions not as intrinsically inert orthographic or phonological units, but as expressions *already in meaningful use*. This is true, even if the rules are formulated in a way that only 'mentions' the expressions in question; for, what they then mention are expressions *qua* meaningfully used linguistic units. Rather than infusing life into a dead raw material of sounds and shapes, describing what words express means to take the presence of such life for granted.

1.5. Rules and Normativity

My discussion in the previous section was tentative and, of course, in great need of further clarification. In fact, my claim that rules of usage do not determine what meanings words can be used to express gives rise to a number of questions. One question is this: Even if it has to be admitted that unprecedented yet immediately intelligible uses of words are frequent in everyday speech, mustn't there exist some principles which prevent linguistic practice from becoming completely capricious? Indeed, isn't the consequence of what I have said above downright linguistic anarchy? Don't I subscribe to what is, in effect, a version of Humpty Dumpty's famous and clearly untenable

conception of language use, according to which each individual is free to mean whatever he likes by the words he uses?[36]

This objection is off the mark. I did not say that we, as individuals, are able to express whatever we like by the words we use. My point concerned not the freedom but the primacy of meaningful expression. I did not argue that 'anything goes', but that rules of usage do not set the limits of meaningful speech.

Consider the following case. Magda lends Paul 200 dollars and says, 'I want the money back within a fortnight'. Paul answers, 'I promise to return them to you within that period of time'. Twelve days later, Magda calls Paul and accuses him of having broken his promise. Paul defends himself: 'What do you mean? It has only been twelve days, hasn't it?' 'Yes', Magda replies, 'and you promised to pay me back within a fortnight!' Paul objects: 'But a fortnight is fourteen days...' Suddenly, Magda becomes uncertain: 'Is it...? When I used the word, I meant ten days...'.

Clearly, Magda's accusation is unjustified. Paul has not broken any promise. What he promised was to give the money back within a fortnight, i.e., within fourteen days. Whether Magda intended it or not, what she said when she lent him the money was that she needed them back within fourteen, not ten, days.

But again, none of the claims made in the previous section conflicts with this obvious fact. What I argued was not that meaning is a matter of individual intention, but that rules cannot serve to determine what particular utterances mean. Thus, the rule

(R6) A fortnight is a period of fourteen days

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[36] The passage where Humpty Dumpty formulates his much discussed *laissez-faire* conception of linguistic meaning is found in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass*. Cf. L. Carroll, *The Annotated Alice*, ed. M. Gardner (Hammondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970), pp. 268f. A very interesting and all too neglected survey of the problems surrounding such a conception is M. Hancher, 'Humpty Dumpty and Verbal Meaning', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 40 (1981). For a comprehensive discussion of Carrollian nonsense, cf. J-J. Lecercle, *Philosophy of Nonsense. The Intuitions of Victorian Nonsense Literature* (London: Routledge, 1994).

cannot function to explain *why* Magda's utterance meant what it meant. Rather, it serves to describe wherein this meaning consists.

Another question has to do with the *normativity* of rules. In section 1.1, I quoted numerous passages in which various thinkers claimed that linguistic meaning is normative. I also remarked that there is little consensus among these thinkers regarding how, exactly, the notion of 'normativity' is to be understood. One thing that they all seemed to have in common, however, was the view that linguistic normativity is somehow a matter of *prescription*. I.e., they all associated normativity with distinctions like right-wrong, appropriate-inappropriate, correct-incorrect, allowed-forbidden, should-should not, and so forth.

It might seem that my characterisation of rules leaves no room for their having such a prescriptive status. It may look as if the consequence of what I have said is that rules of usage are quite unable to distinguish between correct and incorrect employments of words. For example, I said that rules of usage are not fixed in the same sense as the rules of soccer and basketball. My suggestion seemed to be that as long as our utterances make sense everything is perfectly all right – no matter what rules we follow. Does this not empty the rules of all normative force?

Well, it all depends on what is supposed to be prescribed – what notions of linguistic 'correctness' and 'incorrectness' are at stake. When I contrasted rules of usage with the fixed rules of basketball and soccer, what I had in mind was the distinction between meaningful and nonsensical speech. My point was that the following parallel is mistaken:

The rules of basketball determine when a basketball player behaves correctly and when he behaves incorrectly.

Rules of usage determine when a speaker utters something meaningful and when he utters something meaningless.

I did *not* want to deny that there are other notions of linguistic 'correctness' and 'incorrectness' such that rules of usage may indeed be used somewhat like basketball rules.

Consider the following example. Nora asks her friend from Paris, Philippe, to read a poem that she has written and tell her what he thinks of it. Among the comments Philippe makes is the following:

I don't see why you bracken the final stanza.

In this case, it is natural to say: Philippe employs 'bracken' where he *should* have used 'bracket'. On hearing Philippe's comment, Nora might correct him: 'No, no, "bracken" is the name of a kind of plant. The right word is "bracket".' The statement, '"bracken" is the name of a kind of plant' may, in this context, be conceived as a rule of usage; and Nora employs this rule as a norm or prescription. Here is a case where a rule of usage may indeed be said to play a normative-prescriptive role.

But notice also that it would only indicate excessive and misplaced zeal for accuracy to accuse Philippe of speaking 'nonsense'. In fact, it is immediately clear that his comment is a comment on the fact that Nora has bracketed the final stanza of her poem. In *this* sense, it seems fair to say that 'bracken', as it occurs in Philippe's utterance, means what native Englishmen usually mean by 'bracket'. The rule '"bracken" is the name of a kind of plant' in no ways *stops* the word 'bracken' as it occurs in Philippe's utterance from meaning bracket. Indeed, from *this* viewpoint there is no difference in principle between Phillippe's utterance and constructions like 'Trieste is no Vienna', where, without previous warning, a word is given a new and yet immediately recognisable function.

Someone might want to protest that the meaning of 'bracken' is fixed independently of its being used by Philippe to talk of Nora's bracketing the final stanza of her poem. According to this sort of objection, that Philippe manages to convey the message he conveys is not a consequence of what his words literally mean, but a kind of pragmatic side-effect of it. *Strictly* speaking, Philippe's utterance is ill-formed nonsense, since he uses the word 'bracken' where, given its literal meaning, it does not fit.

Now, if this protest is only a somewhat fervent way of repeating Nora's correction of Philippe's deviant usage, then I have nothing to object. Again, I do not want to deny that, relative to the standards of good English, Philippe's utterance is 'incorrect'. On the other hand, if the protest constitutes an attempt

to save the idea of rules as determining not just what is good and bad English, but what is meaningful and what is meaningless, then I do think there are reasons to be sceptical. For this means to invoke the distinction between the 'literal' meanings and the 'pragmatic side-effects' of Philippe's words as an *ad hoc* device designed to neutralise any counterexample to this problematic idea. It means to beg the question, by classifying Philippe's unprecedented yet immediately intelligible form of language use as having some *other* kind of significance than what is, 'strictly speaking', to be counted as 'the meanings of his words'.

In fact, the idea that, *strictly* speaking, Philippe's utterance is ill-formed nonsense, since he uses the word 'bracken' where, given its literal meaning, it does not fit, involves a confusion of two quite different perspectives. One is the perspective from which one distinguishes between correct and incorrect English. From this viewpoint, the 'bracken' in Philippe's utterance does indeed constitute a linguistic mistake, and the rule '"bracken" is the name of a kind of plant' functions as a kind of prescription of how units of the orthographic design 'bracken' are correctly employed. The other perspective is one from which the relevant distinction is not between good and bad English, but between meaningful and meaningless speech. From this sort of perspective, Philippe's utterance is not different, in principle, from Isabelle's 'Tonight's concert is 2 yards 2 feet long' or Frege's 'Trieste is no Vienna'. This is a perspective from which rules of usage are not conceived as norms, but as mere descriptions of meaningful ways of talking. It is a perspective which involves no externalisation of the relation between expressions and their intelligible employment, but which, on the contrary, conceives language from within its meaningful use.

If our concern is not to distinguish between good and bad English, but to capture the real-life, meaningful employment of words, rules of usage are to be treated as descriptions rather than as prescriptions. From this sort of perspective, what makes the rules *rules* is not that they tell us what speakers should and should not do, but only that they describe *ways* of using linguistic expressions, by providing specifications of what is involved in an expression's functioning in the *same* way in various particular instances of speech. The rules serve to characterize *similarities* and *differences* in meaning. Thus, the rule

(R1) The length of a river is specified in spatial terms

identifies a form of use that is common to both 'The Nile River is 6670 kilometers long' and 'The Nile River is 5464 kilometers long', as I use these sentences when I work as a teacher. Indeed, it describes a form of use that these two statements have in common with an indefinite number of other statements, such as:

The Rhine is 1320 kilometer long.
The Rio Grande is 3030 kilometers long.
The Amazon River is 7025 kilometers long.

In all these instances, the expression 'The (river) … is … long' functions in the same way: it leaves the same meaningful contribution to the propositional whole of which it forms a part. And this way of functioning, this contribution, is what the rule (R1) specifies.

By contrast, in the imagined adventurers' utterances, 'The Rhine is 4 to 5 days long', 'The Rio Grande is a week long', and 'The Nile River is a fortnight long', the length of a river is spoken of in an entirely different sense. To repeat, this difference in meaning can be described in terms of the difference between the rule (R1) and the rule,

(R2) The length of a river is specified in terms of how long time it would take to travel along the river by speedboat.

Again, if we are concerned with meaning, what is important about (R1) and (R2) is not their having some normative, prescriptive function. The reason for calling them 'rules' is not that they tell us what we should or should not do, but that they describe ways of using language with which particular instances of speech may or may not be in accord.

I should add, however, that my point here is not to quibble over terminology. If someone says:

Given the rule (R1), 'The Nile River is 5464 kilometers long' is correct (right, appropriate), whereas 'The Nile River is a fortnight long' is incorrect (wrong, inappropriate),

it is not at all evident that he denies what I have argued above. After all, it might happen that what he means is *only*:

'The Nile River is 5464 kilometers long' is in accordance with the rule (R1), whereas 'The Nile River is a fortnight long' is not in accordance with (R1).

If so, I have nothing to object against what he says – except that his employment of prescriptive-sounding words such as 'right' and 'appropriate' may be misleading. What I have criticised in this section is not such innocuous and ultimately redundant employment of a normative vocabulary. Rather, my target has been the idea that rules of usage draw the line between meaningfulness and nonsensicality by prescribing, in a more substantial, non-redundant sense, how language users ought and ought not to behave.

1.6. Rules and Philosophical Problems

According to the subtitle of this book, the present investigation is concerned with the philosophical significance of meaning and rules. On reading what I have written in this first chapter, however, one might well wonder if rules of the sort I have discussed can play any philosophically significant role at all. Indeed, has not almost everything that I have said tended towards a deflation of the importance of such rules? After all, I have in effect denied that they can play any substantial role in an explanation of the phenomenon of linguistic significance. I have claimed that rules of this sort cannot serve to imbue words with meaning, nor prescribe how words should be used in order to be used meaningfully.

It is indeed true that my considerations strike a discordant note with the idea of giving a substantial explanatory account, in terms of rules, of how linguistic expressions achieve their significance. Moreover, my reflections stand in direct conflict with the picture of the philosopher as a kind of censor

or referee who, knowing the rules which supposedly determine which uses of language are wrong and which are right, is able to decide whether a given utterance makes sense. If I am correct, the character of the rules makes it impossible for the philosopher to take on such a position. Not acting in accordance with certain established rules of usage is not the same as speaking nonsense. I may well say something that is perfectly meaningful, even if my way of talking deviates from normal usage.

But then, why are rules of usage philosophically interesting? There may be many different answers to this question. Philosophical quandaries are of many different sorts, and arise in various ways. What I will focus on here, however, is the fact that many philosophical problems emerge from what might be called an *entanglement* in rules, in ways of using language. The rules in question may be perfectly all right in themselves, but when they are, as it were, unconsciously *crossed*, the result is confusion of a typically philosophical kind. The disentangling of such confusions does not consist in deciding which ways of using language are 'appropriate' and which are 'inappropriate'. What is needed is rather a clear identification of those different ways of using language that the confused individual fails to keep separate. The task is not to exercise some kind of censorship, but to help those who fail to keep track of their usage to solve the resulting perplexities by simply describing the relevant habits of speech.

Consider an example of such a confusion:

Does time have a beginning or not? On the one hand, it seems clear that time can have no beginning. For suppose that time started, say, 15 billion years ago, as the majority of cosmologists seems to think. Then, trivially, there would be no earlier points in time. For example, '16 billion years ago' would not signify a point in time. But that is surely absurd! *Of course* 16 billion years ago is a point in time. Generally speaking, time's beginning would have to be the *first* point in time. But the idea of such a first point is incomprehensible, since no matter how many years back you go, there will always be earlier points in time.

On the other hand, maintaining that time has been going on for infinitely long seems equally problematic. For that would mean that an infinite period of time has passed before now. But if an infinite period of

time had to pass before the present moment occurred, then it seems entirely incomprehensible how the present moment could occur at all. For, after all, saying of something that it will take place only after an infinite period of time is just an artful way of saying that it will *never* take place. So, time's having no beginning seems just as absurd as its having a beginning. And that is paradoxical! For, of course, either time has a beginning or it has not. Or do we have to conclude that time is some sort of mysterious process that neither has nor lacks a beginning?[37]

It seems plausible to suspect that the two apparently conflicting arguments presented here – one against the notion of time's having a beginning, the other against the notion of time's lacking a beginning – are not conflicting arguments at all. Rather, they manifest two quite different ways of using the expressions 'time', 'point in time', and so forth. Hence, the apparent antinomy is not an antinomy at all. Rather, the illusion of paradoxicality arises because one shifts between the two different forms of use without noticing it.

Let us look more in detail at what this diagnosis amounts to. In the first part of the statement of the paradox, it is said that time cannot have a beginning because the very idea of a first point in time is incomprehensible. 'No matter how many years back you go, there will always be earlier points in time'. One might imagine that someone accompanies this statement by drawing a picture where the past points in time are lined up one after another in a long row, just like an enormously long string of pearls which disappears out of sight somewhere in the remote distance. This is an enchanting picture. We can all, I think, feel the temptation to represent the past in this or some equivalent fashion. However, this picture strikes a discordant note with the claim that the very idea of a first point in time is unintelligible. For, of course, the idea of a first pearl in such a string of pearls is not unintelligible. On the contrary, it is difficult to understand what it would mean to say that such a string of pearls does not begin somewhere.

Thus, 'no matter how many years back you go, there will always be earlier points in time' is better conceived as the formulation of a rule of usage.

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[37] The prototype for this example is, of course, Kant's first antinomy of pure reason. Cf. I. Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1956), A426/B454.

This rule means, for example, that, no matter how large n is, expressions of the form 'n years ago' function as true or false answers to questions of the form 'At what point of time did such-and-such happen?'. Accordingly, to the question 'At what point in time did the dinosaurs die out?', '5000 years ago', '1 million years ago', '200 million years ago' and '15 billion years ago' are all treated as (true or false) answers – in contrast to, say, '10 kilometres away' or '500 metres above sea level', which do *not* count as answers to temporal queries.[38]

'16 billion years ago is a point in time' captures the role that '16 billion years ago' has in this and similar 'language games'. Given this usage, to say 'Time has no beginning' is not to claim that a certain extraordinary state of affairs happens to be the case, but to characterise one's own way talking. Hence the apparent triviality: '*Of course*, 16 billion years ago (or 5000 years ago, or 200 million years ago, or 89 trillion years ago...) is a point in time.' This 'of course' has nothing to do with some state-of-affair's being obviously the case, but rather shows how natural the rule in question is to the speaker.

However, it is quite possible to use 'time' in other ways. Consider, for example, the use of sentences such as 'Time starts at 9.00', 'Time has not yet begun!' and 'Time's up!'. The former sentences may be directed at, say, a group of students who are about to take a test; the last sentence may be directed at the same group of students at the end of the examination. Similarly, a sports commentator covering a soccer game may say things like 'Time has been going on for almost 47 minutes now, so we should expect the referee to call off the first half at any second', or (as a comment on the fact that spectators have thrown heaps of toilet-paper and chair cushions onto the field), 'Why on earth doesn't the referee just stop the time and see to it that this garbage is removed?' Here, 'time' is used to name a particular process, rather than to designate a linguistic framework by means of which such particular processes are ordered and delimited.

Now, the second half of the paradox – i.e., the argument against the idea that time lacks a beginning – manifests a use of 'time' as signifying such a

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[38] The exceptions are when the character of the event whose occurrence is to be temporally located makes certain values of 'n' absurd. For example, to the question 'At what point of time did your eleven year old son start reading?', '10 billion years ago' constitutes no meaningful answer.

particular process. Roughly, the picture is as follows. Time is a process, somewhat like a particular soccer game or a particular war. Hence, time cannot have been going on for infinitely long. For no matter how many years such a process goes on, there is no such thing as its reaching an infinite length. Consequently, even if its exact starting-point is an empirical matter, we can be absolutely certain that this starting-point is situated at some finite temporal distance from the present moment.

There is nothing wrong *per se* with this train of thought. We are free to use 'time' as the name of such a process, if we like. Of course, many things need to be filled in. We must give a more precise account of what kind of process time is supposed to be, perhaps by invoking concepts from cosmological theory. However, given that such elaboration is provided, there is no reason to denounce that use of 'time' as somehow wrong or false. Problems arise only if we fail to recognise that this latter kind of use is different from the former one, epitomised by the claim 'Time has no beginning'. Such failure makes us vacillate between the two and leads us into paradoxical reasoning of the kind rehearsed above.

Employing the terminology of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, one might describe the sort of vacillation underlying the paradox of time's beginning as a shifting between treating 'point in time' as a variable-expression and treating it as a genuine property-word. As Cora Diamond points out, the early Wittgenstein argued that this kind of vacillation underlies many philosophical confusions. Consider her discussion of the word 'object':

> When I say "Smith saw an object on the windowsill, about three inches high," the word "object" there really functions as a variable, not (that is) as a word functioning like "potato" but differing from "potato" in meaning a concept with a larger extension than that of the concept *potato*. When we use the word "object" in philosophy, we want it to have the kind of significance which it has in the use-as-variable, but we also (and incoherently) want the word to mean some property which we can ascribe to things - we do want it to have a use logically parallel to "potato" but with a much vaster extension than the concept *potato*. Philosophical uses of "object" *dither* between wanting the word to have the kind of logical

> significance it has functioning as a variable and wanting the word to mean some property, to be a genuine property-word.[39]

Let us pause a little to consider what importance is assigned to 'established usage', or 'everyday language', in the diagnoses delivered above. First of all, it should be emphasised that those diagnoses in no way treat everyday language as sacrosanct. Even if Diamond notes that the use of 'object' as a variable constitutes "[t]he ordinary language use of 'object',"[40] her point is not that departure from this ordinary form of use is somehow mistaken or inappropriate *per se*. What causes philosophical confusion is rather, she says, the tacit wavering between this everyday use of 'object' as a variable, and the use of ordinary property-words. Similarly, in my discussion of the paradox of time's beginning, I did not claim that using 'time' in other ways than as a variable is somehow prohibited or incorrect. In fact, I pointed out that alternative forms of use are often perfectly meaningful. Philosophical disquietude arises only when the differences in use are not clearly recognised. It is the failure to recognise such differences, rather than mere deviance from established ways of talking, which gives rise to the paradox of time's beginning.

However, even if everyday forms of language use cannot be used as standards against which the meaningfulness of particular utterances is to be measured, this everyday aspect is not wholly irrelevant to the character and solution of philosophical problems like that of time's beginning. More precisely, this everydayness is to a large extent responsible for both the *difficulty* and the experienced *depth* of the problems under consideration. In this connection, it is crucial to remember that 'everyday language' does not just mean 'frequent' or 'non-technical' language. Above all, it refers to the most *primitive*, *habitual* layers of linguistic practice; those ways of speaking which we usually engage in without any reflection or deliberation at all, and in which, in most cases, we were trained to participate already as children. Our participation in such everyday practices is unreflective, blind – and this

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[39] C. Diamond, 'Realism and Resolution: Reply to Warren Goldfarb and Sabina Lovibond', *Journal of Philosophical Research* 22 (1997), p. 79, original emphases. Cf. also Conant (forthcoming), p. 109 n. 81.
[40] Diamond (1997), p. 79.

lingering blindness makes it extremely difficult to catch sight of those primitive layers of speech, when we reflect upon them. Hence, their customary, routine character makes the entanglement in such habits of speech very diificult to penetrate; much harder than, say, a paradox within formal decision theory.

This is also why philosophical problems of the imagined sort have a much deeper character than a paradox within such a formal system. The symbolism of formal decision theory is not at all as deeply rooted in us as our use of words such as 'time' and 'object'. The former symbolism is something we learn in explicit form in a university course. It is given to us as an intellectual construction which we can choose to use or not to use, and we can seriously consider replacing it with other, alternative symbolisms. By contrast, our ways of using 'time' and 'object' are practices to which we do not have this sort of intellectual relationship. Our learning to use these words was a matter of training, rather than of explicit instruction. And we cannot *seriously* consider replacing these ways of using language with some alternative symbolism. Even if it might be possible to imagine alternative ways of talking, in practice we cannot help using language in those ways that we were trained to use it. In this very concrete, tangible sense, we do not have the sort of intellectual distance to these forms of language use that we have to the symbolism of formal decision-theory. This is the most important reason why a decision-theoretical paradox is experienced only as a technical riddle, whereas the paradox of time's beginning might well be conceived as a real mystery.[41]

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In what remains of this section, I will deliver yet another, presumably more controversial, diagnosis of a philosophical confusion. The problem in question is the one known as 'Moore's paradox'. I will argue that this is also a case

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[41] Cf. Wittgenstein (1958), §111. I am indebted to Sharon Rider and Sören Stenlund for their insisting on this important point. For a discussion of the role of ordinary language in Wittgenstein's philosophy, see M. Gustafsson, 'Custom and Origin. The Place of Ordinary Language in Wittgenstein's and Heidegger's Thinking', forthcoming in O. Gundersen (ed.), *Culture, Language and Practice after Herder and Humboldt*, Research Report (Bergen: Sentre for Kulturstudier, Norges forskningsråd).

where confusion arises because we entangle ourselves in our own habits of speech.

Consider the statements:

It is raining in Stockholm.
I do not believe that it is raining in Stockholm.

These statements do not contradict each other. It might rain in Stockholm, despite my not believing so. And yet, there is clearly something absurd about saying:

It is raining in Stockholm and I do not believe that it is raining in Stockholm.

Why is that? This is a conjunction of two non-contradictory statements, is it not? So, should it not constitute a perfectly substantial proposition? And yet, it seems somehow self-refuting. As Moore puts it, this "is a perfectly absurd thing to say, although *what* is asserted is something which is perfectly possible logically[.]"[42]

But is this not puzzling? How can something be 'perfectly possible logically' and yet be 'perfectly absurd'? Moore's way out of this quandary, suggested by quote cited above, is to invoke a distinction between *what* is asserted and the *act* of assertion. According to Moore, it is only my act of assertion which is absurd, whereas there is nothing absurd about the asserted proposition itself. More precisely, his alleged solution to the problem is based on the idea that one's saying that p *tacitly implies* one's believing that p. Thus, when I assert the first conjunct, 'It is raining in Stockholm', I imply (without explicitly saying) that I believe that it is raining in Stockholm; and it is this tacitly implied belief (rather than anything within the asserted proposition itself) which stands in conflict with the second conjunct, 'I do not believe that it is raining in Stockholm'.

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[42] G. E. Moore, 'A Reply to My Critics', in P. A. Schilpp (ed.), *The Philosophy of G. E. Moore* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University, 1942), p. 543. Original emphasis.

Much energy has been spent on making sense of this notion of 'implication'. Moore himself gives a rather implausible account in terms of inductive inference. Supposedly, my tacit implication "simply arises from the fact, which we all learn by experience, that in the immense majority of cases a man who makes such an assertion as this does believe or know what he asserts[.]"[43] The untenability of such an account has been pointed out several times, for example by Thomas Baldwin. Baldwin suggests an alternative story, in terms of a Gricean speech-act analysis:

> the implication must arise from the intention, constitutive of the speech-act of assertion, of providing one's audience with information through their recognition that this is one's intention. For since one cannot be understood as intending to inform someone that *p* unless one is believed by them to believe that *p*, the intention to be thus understood includes the intention to be taken to believe what one asserts.[44]

Baldwin's idea is that, in asserting 'It is raining in Stockholm and I do not believe that it is raining in Stockholm', I intend my audience to form two conflicting beliefs. By the first half of my utterance, I intend to inform my audience that it is raining in Stockholm; and, supposedly, this requires that I intend them to believe that *I believe that it is raining in Stockholm*. By the second half, however, I assert the opposite, thereby intending my audience to believe that *I do not believe that it is raining in Stockholm*. If the hearers are to regard me as making an assertion, I must intend them to form these two contradictory beliefs; and therein lies the absurdity of my utterance.

This account has been criticised in various ways, and a number of modifications have been suggested.[45] However, I shall spare the reader the details of this discussion. For I think the basic defect of this sort of solution does not reside in the technical details of the notion of 'implication', but in the very separation (common to Moore, Baldwin, and most other philosophers who have worked with the paradox) between my 'act of assertion' and 'the asserted proposition itself'.

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[43] Moore (1942), pp. 542f.
[44] T. Baldwin, *G. E. Moore* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 228.
[45] Cf., e.g., O. R. Jones, 'Moore's Paradox, Assertion and Knowledge', *Analysis* 51 (1991); M. Welbourne, 'More on Moore', *Analysis* 52 (1992).

By invoking a distinction between what is internal and what is external to 'what is asserted', Moore and Baldwin believe they can accomodate both the 'absurdity' and the alleged 'logical possibility' of 'It is raining in Stockholm and I do not believe that it is raining in Stockholm'. On the one hand, this sentence is said to be perfectly meaningful and perhaps even true. On the other hand, external mechanisms of implication are supposed to prevent me from using it to convey any information at all.

But now, one wishes to ask: How is it then, *really* – do I manage to say anything meaningful or not? My words are said to express a certain message, but my uttering those words is supposed to cancel the possibility of my conveying this message. As Baldwin puts it, "one who utters one of Moore's paradoxical sentences cannot thereby convey the information that he appears to be trying to convey[.]"[46] But how on earth can I appear to be trying to convey a certain piece of information without really conveying it? It is as if my hearers are supposed to think: 'Well, the *words* Martin utters certainly contain certain information (namely, that it is raining in Stockholm although he believes it is not); but, unfortunately, the fact that he utters those words stops him from providing us with that piece of information.' This cannot be right. If my hearers grasp the meaning of my words, then *a fortiori* I have provided them with the adequate information. No external mechanisms of implication can undo this accomplishment.

Consequently, I suspect that a 'solution' of the kind proposed by Moore and Baldwin only sweeps the problem under the rug. As long as it is assumed that *something* is expressed by the conjunction of 'It is raining in Stockholm' and 'I do not believe that it is raining in Stockholm', it is inexplicable how my uttering that conjunction can fail to convey this something. What we need is rather to question this assumption. I.e., we need to accept fully the sense of absurdity. It is not only that my assertion is absurd in some sense that is external to what it is that I assert. Rather, we should take seriously the fact that I do not manage to assert anything at all.

This may seem strange. Of course, one wishes to say, the conjunction of 'It is raining in Stockholm' and 'I do not believe that it is raining in Stockholm' is meaningful and possibly true. After all, both these sentences might be true at

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[46] Baldwin (1990), p. 229.

the same time; and in that case, their conjunction is *trivially* true. So, the idea that conjoining these sentences gives rise to an absurd whole is excluded by the very logic of conjunction.

But this objection misses the target. What I argue is not that conjoining 'It is raining in Stockholm' and 'I do not believe that it is raining in Stockholm' results in an absurdity. Rather, my point is that *there is nothing like conjoining these two sentences*, as they are normally understood. I.e., it is simply *part of how these sentences are normally used* that nothing can constitute their conjunction. In particular, the word-sequence 'It is raining in Stockholm and I do not believe that it is raining in Stockholm' does not constitute such a conjunction. Of course, the fact that the *words* 'It is raining in Stockholm' and 'I do not believe it is raining in Stockholm' are joined by the little word 'and' makes it seem as if what we have here is such a conjunction. But that is an illusion.

This may still sound weird, so let me try to be more precise. My claim is that Moore's paradox arises because we, as it were, 'cross' two different rules of usage. On the *one* hand, there is the rule which captures what a conjunction is. To use the word 'and' as a conjunction means to use it in the following way:

> If 'a' is true, and if 'b' is true, then 'a and b' is true; otherwise, 'a and b' is false.

On the *other* hand, there is our established way of using sentences like 'I do not believe that it is raining in Stockholm'. And, again, it is a characteristic part of this established way of talking that nothing is understandable as a conjunction of 'It is raining in Stockholm' and 'I do not believe that it is raining in Stockholm'. I.e., insofar as 'and' functions as a sign for conjunction, 'It is raining in Stockholm and I do not believe that it is raining in Stockholm' *does not constitute an instance of this established way of talking*. The felt 'absurdity' requires no explanation in terms of tacit implication. It is just a reflection of our being at home in this way of using language.

All in all, when we encounter a word-sequence like 'It is raining in Stockholm and I do not believe that it is raining in Stockholm', we are, as it were, torn between two ways of talking. On the one hand, we are accustomed to employing 'and' more or less as a sign for conjunction. Since 'It is raining in

Stockholm' and 'I do not believe that it is raining in Stockholm' can both be true at the same time, it then seems as if 'It is raining in Stockholm and I do not believe that it is raining in Stockholm' is perfectly meaningful and quite possibly true. On the other hand, we are accustomed to employing 'I do not believe that p' in such a way that there is nothing like conjoining it with 'p'. And this is why 'It is raining in Stockholm and I do not believe that it is raining in Stockholm' is absurd. Thus the solution to the paradox does not consist in an elaborate theory of implication, but just in the recognition of these two different forms of use; the realisation that our confusion arises because we insist on trying to play two incompatible games at the same time.

Of course, I do not want to deny that there are other uses of 'I do not believe that p', such that 'p and I do not believe that p' is possible to understand as a genuine conjunction. For example, suppose I look at an old photograph of myself, where I make a terribly embarrasing grimace. Remembering the occasion, I explain my odd facial expression: 'I don't believe there is film in the camera, but there is!' Or consider Peter, who suffers from severe misanthropy. He tends to mistrust not just humanity in general, but even close friends and relatives. However, he also regards this misanthropy as his worst character trait, and does everything he can to combat it. Thus, when his friend Susan voluntarily offers to look after his dog when he goes on holiday, his spontaneous thought is, 'What is it that she wants to gain by rendering me this service?'. Then, suddenly feeling ashamed of his mistrust, he reproaches himself: 'She just wants to help me, and I don't believe it!'

However, none of these examples are paradoxical in the relevant sense. For the paradox depends on that use of 'I do not believe that p' which does not have, among its instances, any conjunction 'p and I do not believe that p'. It is only against the background of this ordinary use that the required sense of absurdity can arise. On the other hand, the paradox also depends on our taking for granted that the rule of conjunction must always be in force; that, as soon as we have two non-contradictory statements, it must be possible to bring them together in a meaningful, non-contradictory conjunction. Unless we see that our ordinary use of 'I believe that p' is a counterinstance to this, we will inevitably arive at paradoxical results.

Of course, there is more to say about Moore's paradox. For example, an important aspect is the superficial similarity between first-person and third-

person talk of belief; i.e., between 'I do not believe that p' and 'He does not believe that p'. A very important reason why 'It is raining in Stockholm and I do not believe that it is raining in Stockholm' seems to be 'perfectly possible logically', is surely that 'It is raining in Stockholm and *he* does not believe that it is raining in Stockholm' is. Another interesting aspect is the temptation to think of beliefs as self-contained mental states on a par with migraine and hunger. If we think of belief as a self-contained mental state similar to hunger, this will further increase the tendency to think that, 'in itself', 'It is raining in Stockholm and I do not believe that it is raining in Stockholm' makes perfectly good sense.[47]

Thus, Moore's paradox is interesting because it constitutes a sort of focal point where three important kinds of philosophical misunderstanding converge: (i) an exaggerated confidence in the applicability of truth-functional connectives; (ii) the assimilation of first person and third person perspectives; and, (iii) the tendency to think of everything 'mental' as self-contained states on a par with hunger and migraine.

Hence Moore's paradox presents us with a number of various confusions to disentangle. Indeed, in order to really silence the various temptations which induce us to think that the paradoxicality of Moore's sentences is a problem requiring a positive, substantial explanation, a much more extensive investigation than can be provided here would be necessary. In fact, this is typical for philosophy. One confusion is rarely isolated from others. What may appear like separate quandaries are often like mushrooms tied together by an intricate subterranean mycelium of thought patterns, and getting clear about the structure of one confusion requires a simultaneous clarification of a host of others.

In this section, however, the aim has only been to indicate why rules of usage are philosophically significant, despite the fact that they do not serve to explain the phenomenon of linguistic meaning, nor allow the philosopher to act

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[47] For interesting discussions of this aspect of Moore's paradox, cf. A. W. Collins, 'Moore's Paradox and Epistemic Risk', *The Philosophical Quarterly* 46 (1996); J. Heal, 'Moore's Paradox: A Wittgensteinian Approach', *Mind* 103 (1994); K. Linville and M. Ring, 'Moore's Paradox Revisited', *Synthese* 87 (1991). For a treatment of Moore's paradox that is closely related to the one presented here, cf. P. Segerdahl, *Language Use* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), pp. 157f.

as a censor distinguishing 'appropriate' from 'inappropriate' uses of language. Rules enter the picture, not as prescriptions, but as descriptions of ways in which words are employed. These descriptions are important because they serve to discern differences in usage that we are inclined to forget and conflate when we philosophise. By identifying these differences, the rules help us out of the confusions to which such obliviousness gives rise.

1.7. Summary

In this chapter, I have considered what sense, if any, can be made of the notion of meaningful speech as a normative, rule-governed activity. The aim has been to give a preliminary survey of themes to which I will return in a more detailed discussion later in the book. Let me repeat four important points that I have made.

First, the distinction between following and not following a certain rule of usage is not the same as the distinction between saying something true and saying something false. One might well speak falsely and yet follow a certain rule of usage. For such rules have to do with conceptual distinctions – with differences in meaning – rather than with the empirical question of which statements are true and which are false.

Second, rules of usage cannot be employed to draw the line between meaningful and nonsensical speech. Such rules do not settle which particular instances of speech make sense. On the contrary, what comes first is the fact that something meaningful is being said. The rules can only register, afterwards as it were, how the words in question are being used.

Third, I have insisted on a distinction between the question of whether a given utterance constitutes an instance of good, standard English, and the question of whether such an utterance makes sense, and, if so, what it means. If our concern is to preserve the purity of language, rules of usage may indeed be employed as prescriptions which distinguish between 'correct' in 'incorrect' ways of speaking. However, if our concern is to capture the real-life, meaningful employment of words, the rules can only serve as descriptions. As such descriptions, they do not treat linguistic expressions as mere orthographic or phonological units, but as words already in meaningful use.

Fourth, I tried to show why rules of usage may be relevant in philosophy. I gave examples of philosophical problems that arise because of what I called an 'entanglement' in such rules. In order to disentangle such confusions, it is necessary to make oneself aware of the ways of talking that these rules capture. This disentanglement process takes place from a purely descriptive perspective: what is important is simply to become aware of the differences between those habits of speech the confusion of which gives rise to the philosophical problem. Whether one of these forms of language use is more 'appropriate' than the other is immaterial to the solution of the difficulty.

2

Rules and Nonsense

2.1. Introduction

Throughout the history of philosophy, thinkers have accused other thinkers of speaking nonsense. Hobbes condemns the writings of "School divines" for containing "nothing else for the most part, but insignificant trains of strange and barbarous words[.]" Nonsense, according to Hobbes, is "the privilege of absurdity; to which no living creature is subject, but man only. And of men, those are of all most subject to it, that profess philosophy."[48] In a similar vein, Berkeley speaks of abstract philosophical terminology as "that common dangerous way of cheating men into absurditys"; such words, he says, are nothing but "Gibberish, Jargon & deserve not the name of Language."[49] A century and a half later, Nietzsche would repudiate the Kantian notion of a 'thing-in-itself' as a "perverse" and "nonsensical" idea which constitutes nothing but a linguistic illusion.[50]

It was during the first half of the 20th century, however, that this kind of charge became particularly current. In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein declared, famously, that "Most propositions and questions, that have been written about philosophical matters, are not false, but nonsensical."[51] Inspired by this claim, logical positivists aspired to show that the traditional metaphysician, in Ayer's words, "produces sentences which fail to conform to the conditions under

[48] T. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. M. Oakeshott (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1946), pp. 449 and 27.
[49] G. Berkeley, *Philosophical Commentaries*, in *Philosophical Works*, ed. M. R. Ayers (London: Everyman, 1993), §696.
[50] F. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, ed. W. Kaufmann, transl. W. Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1967), Book 3, §§556, 558, 562.
[51] L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, transl. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (London: Routledge, 1961), § 4.003.