

MEANING

THE MOVE FROM MIND TO PRACTICES

Jay Sloss



MEANING

THE MOVE FROM MINDS TO PRACTICES

A thesis submitted in fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Philosophy
at the University of Canterbury

by

Jay Sloss

University of Canterbury 2007

The propositions which one comes back to again and again as if bewitched —these I should like to expunge from philosophical language

- Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Blue and Brown Books*, § 31

MEANING

MAKING THE MOVE FROM MINDS TO PRACTICES

ABSTRACT

For centuries referential theories of language and meaning have dominated Western philosophy. The idea that noises and scratches become meaningful words and writing by virtue of a mental grasp one has on the referents they are talking about has become deeply entrenched. Starting with Plato, and reinvented by Locke, contemporary theorists continue to reproduce this mental fix requirement (MFR) in their philosophies of language and intentionality—Physicalists, such as Paul and Patricia Churchland are typical. Plato, Locke and the Churchlands all share the view that bits of language reach out to extra-linguistic entities by some act of mind (for Plato the mind grasped referents via the Forms, for Locke Ideas bridged the relation, and the Churchland's, brain states). In each case a self-referential mental act gets language up and running, i.e. mental connections (or representations) to referents do the trick. My question also concerns what makes squiggles and noises meaningful. The question is a nested one—ancillary to it are questions of what makes language work? How do words mean or relate to the world? How do speakers mean certain things and not others? I will approach the question from a contextualist perspective where roles in rule-governed activities are the bottom line, not representations in the mind/brain.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dr. Thomas W. Bestor (former lecturer at the University of Canterbury) has made a substantial contribution to this project. I am grateful for his continued support, morally and academically. You were an inspiration throughout the various stages of my research and writing, and a sympathetic, nurturing reader. Diane Proudfoot for her challenging and rigorous supervision. Thank you for your patience. Bernice McKay, my fiancé, for her support at every stage of my research. I am grateful for her comments, editorial work and critical eye throughout the many permutations this piece has been through. Thank you for helping me figure out exactly what I meant. And thank you especially for keeping me on track.

Thomas W. BESTOR (1998): *Study Guide and Readings in the Wittgensteinian Tradition*, Massey University.

University of Canterbury
Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies
13.02.07

MEANING

MAKING THE MOVE FROM MINDS TO PRACTICES

Analytical Table of Contents	i
Chapter One: Introduction	01
Chapter Two: Early and Late Versions of the Mental Fix Requirement	07
Chapter Three: Deflating the Mental Fix Requirement	27
Chapter Four: Grammar and the Mental Fix Requirement	52
Chapter Five: Implications for Intentionality	64
Conclusion	74
Bibliography	77

ANALYTICAL TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION; THE MENTAL FIX REQUIREMENT	01
1.1. THE ACCOMPANIMENT PICTURE OF MEANING	02
—THE MENTAL FIX REQUIREMENT AND LANGUAGE	
1.2. THREE THEORIES OF MEANING—OVERVIEW OF THE ACCOMPANIMENT PICTURE	02

CHAPTER TWO

EARLY AND LATE VERSIONS OF THE MENTAL FIX REQUIREMENT;
A PRELIMINARY TO THE TRANSITION FROM MINDS TO PRACTICES

PART I—PLATO'S TWO-WORLD THEORY OF EVERYTHING

2.1. INTRODUCTION: PLATO'S STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE	07
2.2. PLATO'S TWO-WORLD ONTOLOGY: THE ONE OVER MANY PRINCIPLE	07
2.3. PLATO'S EPISTEMOLOGICAL THEORY	08
2.4. PLATO'S THEORY OF PERCEPTION	09
2.5. PLATO'S LINGUISTIC THESIS: THE TWO-WORLD THEORY OF NAMING	10
—THE ONTOLOGICAL ROUTE TO SEMANTICS	
2.6. THE EPONYMY THESIS	11
2.7. UPPER-WORLD MODALITY AND THE BACK-PASSING PRINCIPLE	13
2.8. EPILOGUE: THE PROMISE OF EPOYNOMY AND THE BACK-PASSING PRINCIPLE	15

PART II—COLLAPSING THE TWO-WORLD THEORY:

2.9. LOCKE'S NEW WAY OF IDEAS	17
—THE WHOLESALE RELOCATION OF MEANING TO THE MIND	
2.10. LOCKE'S EPISTEMIC THESIS	19
2.11. LOCKE'S LINGUISTIC THESIS	20
2.12. THE REIFICATION OF LOCKE'S IDEAS	21
—NEUROPHYSIOLOGICAL MODELS OF REPRESENTATION	
2.13. THE LAMINAR CORTEX	22
2.14. CHURCHLAND'S EPISTEMIC THESIS: STATE-SPACE REPRESENTATION	22
2.15. CHURCHLAND'S LINGUISTIC THESIS: STATE-SPACE SEMANTICS	25
2.16. BRAINS MAKE LANGUAGE WORK	26

CHAPTER THREE

MEANING IN PRACTICE; DEFLATING THE PICTURE OF THE INNER EVENT—THE
TRANSITION FROM MINDS TO PRACTICES

3.1. WHY STUDY MEANING?	27
3.2. THE PRIORITY OF ACTION	29
—J. L. AUSTIN'S PRELIMINARY DEFLATION OF THE PRIORITY OF MIND	
3.3. EVERYTHING OUTER, NOTHING INNER?	32
—A DISCLAIMER AND A NOTE ON DEFLATION	
3.4. COLOUR PREDICATES—CASE STUDY	34
3.5. COLOUR PREDICATES VIS-À-VIS MENTAL CONTENT	35
3.6. COLOUR PREDICATES VIS-À-VIS OUR PRACTICES FOR TALKING ABOUT THINGS	37
3.7. THE NORMATIVE DIMENSION OF LANGUAGE	38
3.8. LOOK TO SEE	40
3.9. SEMANTIC FIELDS AND FORMS OF LIFE	44
3.10. RECAPITULATION OF THE EPISTEMIC ASSUMPTIONS WE ARE ATTACKING	46
3.11. THE PRIVATE LANGUAGE ARGUMENT	47
3.12. CRITERIA OF SAMENESS OVER TIME	49
3.13. RULE-FOLLOWING AND THE IMPORTANCE OF INFELICITIES	51

CHAPTER FOUR

GRAMMAR AND THE DOUBLING OF MEANING

4.1. THE CATEGORY MISTAKE	53
—THE CONFLATION OF SUBJECT-PREDICATE GRAMMAR WITH SUBJECT-OBJECT EPISTEMOLOGY	
4.2. GRAMMATICAL CHIMERAS	57
4.3. HOW DOES ONE RESIST THESE GRAMMATICAL SIRENS	59
4.4. SUMMARY	63

CHAPTER FIVE

FROM MINDS TO PRACTICES; WIDER PHILOSOPHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THIS AMBIENT PICTURE OF MEANING FOR INTENTIONALITY

5.1. AIM	64
5.2. SITUATED INTENTIONALITY	66
5.3 THE PARALLEL BETWEEN LANGUAGE AND INTENTIONALITY	67
5.4. THE ROLE OF BACKGROUND PRACTICES	68
—THE FIGURE/GROUND ANALYSIS OF INTENTIONALITY AND THE COLLAPSE OF THE SUBJECT/OBJECT DISTINCTION	
5.6. WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE BACKGROUND OF PRACTICES IS ABSENT?	72
5.5. SUMMARY	74

CONCLUSION

Biblography	77
-------------	----

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

THE MENTAL FIX REQUIREMENT

Representational theories of mind and language are persistent theories of intentionality. They have deep historical roots with the likes of Rene Descartes and John Locke, and continue to wield much explanatory force. Simon Blackburn once characterised them as ‘dog-legged’¹ philosophical pictures²—awareness, action and language are all mediated by some kind of mental/intentional content. Usually this intervening content (the ‘joint’ of the dog-leg) has a representational nature—Locke’s *Idea*’s are typical. And while terminology may change, representations in-the-head are still thought to be the main players connecting us to the world. Take for example, Paul Churchland’s recent formulation of ‘State-space representations’.³ The persistent idea is that for us to say things about the world, some kind of mental content has to bridge that relation to the world. Indeed the very possibility of an utterance being meaningful depends on a relation holding between a certain bit of the world and a certain bit of mental stuff—the mental content that accompanies utterances. This mental stuff is usually called *intentional content*, because it is *about* the world; it represents it. According to this picture, noises and squiggles become meaningful speech and writing because of something in the head. My argument is that this split (between public expression and private mental accompaniments) unnecessarily inflates our picture of meaning with extra-linguistic entities. These entities have traditionally been thought to be foundational for the public aspect of language, underlying the public part. These accompaniments have traditionally been thought to make our uses of language meaningful. Such pictures of meaning have taken many forms throughout the history of philosophy. I will survey just three examples of what I take to be paradigmatic cases of the accompaniment picture of meaning and reference⁴—Plato’s Two-world theory of the Forms, John Locke’s New way of Ideas, and Paul Churchland’s State-space Hypothesis.

¹ Blackburn (1984), p.39

² In the *Philosophical Investigations* (1972, §115) Wittgenstein describes different models of explanation as ‘pictures.’ Different models or pictures of reality, for example, are characterised by different ontological and epistemological assumptions about the world.

³ See Churchland (1998) and (2007). More in Part II of chapter 2

⁴ Pace the mental discrimination of referents. See *Blue and Brown Books*, p. 65

1.1. THE ACCOMPANIMENT PICTURE OF MEANING

—THE MENTAL FIX REQUIREMENT AND LANGUAGE

Traditionally, the idea has been that to speak about a certain thing in the world, something in the head distinguishes that referent from everything else in the cosmos by mentally fixing upon it. Typically, this fix has been thought to be a special kind of mental grasp one has on a certain target. Immediately, we strike the mental fix requirement's correlation of language with mind—the use of language involves an agent first *mentally fixing on or grasping* that which they are talking about. Here, language use involves the mental apprehension of referents. I've characterised this requirement as a 'traditional' one because of its long academic tenure. Starting with Plato, and reinvented by Locke, the intuition⁵ that language use necessarily involves an agent *mentally grasping* a certain thing/event before being able to speak meaningfully about it, continues to wield much explanatory force. Paul Churchland's work, for example, stands as a contemporary counterpart to such ideas. Chapter two will survey three accounts of the nature of this *grasping*. Part I of chapter two will trace an early version of the mental fix requirement, and Part II will examine two of its later incarnations. I will show all three to be part of a broader prejudice of how language works.

1.2. THREE THEORIES OF MEANING—OVERVIEW OF THE ACCOMPANIMENT PICTURE

Part I of chapter two begins with Plato's *Two-world Theory of the Forms*. Plato's Two-world theory hangs meaning entirely on the *Forms*—the semantic content of a word depends upon the mental fix a language user has on a certain Form(s). Language users speak meaningfully about things in the world because they can mentally fix upon the archetypal Form that gives being to the object they are talking about. This early version of the mental fix requirement takes what I call an *ontological route to semantics*—things exist because they participate in certain Forms, and on the basis of this ontological relation, names are 'loaned out' to the participant objects. Thus, objects have the right to be called by a certain name or *eponym* because they participate in a certain form. And when using the eponyms in everyday discourse, language users continually fix upon the Forms that bring the objects they are talking

⁵ I will examine the *intuitiveness* of this picture in chapter four. There I will trace the origins and prevalence of the MFR to certain prejudices built into the grammar of our language.

about into existence. The idea is that the fixation language users have on Forms, make their utterances meaningful.

Part II of chapter two starts with John Locke's *Theory of Ideas*. Here I present Locke's representational theory of language as an *internalisation* of Plato's precedent. Here language is still thought to operate on the basis of minds fixing on referents. Only now, *mental Ideas* are doing all the work, not transcendental Forms. Like Plato's Forms, mental Ideas mediate the intentional/semantic relation between agent/word and world. Ideas represent the world and we come to know (i.e. direct ourselves toward) the world through these representations. And the words we use to talk *about* the world stand-in for these ideas. That is, to speak meaningfully, language users fix upon the things/events they're talking about via certain ideas. These Ideas mediate the *reference* between word and world—they discriminate referents by representing them, and refer words to things. The theories of Part II take a *representational* route to semantics—words mean certain things (and not other things) via certain ideas that represent those things. Notice the similarities between each of the epistemic and semantic theses⁶—we come to know and speak about the world because a mental reference is made between one order of things (a Form/Idea) and another (a sensory impression or utterance, for example).

The second section of Part II in chapter two presents a recent counterpart of Locke's theory of meaning. Paul Churchland's *State-space Hypothesis* argues that agents discourse meaningfully about the world in virtue of certain brain states that fix upon the referents of their discourse. That is, words name things via certain brain states that represent those referents. This theory also takes a representational route to semantics—language use still involves an agent having certain representations of the referents they are talking about, only now the agent fixes upon the objects s/he is referring to via 'neuronal state-space positions and transformations'⁷. In each case reference determining representations bridge semantic relations, i.e. referents are still differentiated via representations.

In all three cases something *extra-linguistic* intervenes between language and world—i.e. a special mental fix the agent has on the referents of their utterances. The mental fix makes noises and squiggles into meaningful words and writing by directing

⁶ Plato's Two-world theory has a stronger ontological flavour than Locke's. Plato splits the cosmos into two separate realms, while Locke keeps everything in the world. Apart from that aspect, the epistemic and semantic theses are comparable in terms of the referential apparatus they employ.

⁷ Churchland, (1986), p. 280. Strictly speaking, this theory takes a *physicalist* route to semantics.

(or better, *referring*) agents and their utterances to the things they are talking about. When philosophizing the MFR, philosophers tend to focus on the nature of the mental fix mediating word and world. This focus is premised on the idea that the reference of an expression is the meaning of an expression, and further that this connection (between referent and word) is forged by minds. I will challenge both of these assumptions, and show the meaning of an expression to stem from its use in practice. Ultimately, my claim is that our intentional relation to the world is not bridged by representations of it.

Chapter three treats the mental fix requirement to a Wittgensteinian reading; deflating the priority of minds and representations relative to the use of language. Wittgenstein's later philosophical work was largely dedicated to expunging the assumption that philosophy might explain the unhidden on the basis of the hidden.⁸ He thought the content (or meaning) of an expression stems principally from its *role in a language-game and wider place this role has in a form of life*; not the mental fix the language user has on the referents of their words. Language use is not first a matter of representing a certain state of affairs and secondarily of expressing that mental state—'words are not a translation of something else that was there before they were'.⁹ Mental states do not determine content, *roles in linguistic practices do*. And this was Wittgenstein's revolutionary idea—speaking meaningfully about things needn't be predicated on the mental grasps one has of certain referents—referents have already been gotten hold of (i.e. set into meaningful relationships) by the historical practices of a certain form of life. That is, the semantic content of an utterance is proportionate to the role it plays in a language-game. Roles in language-games fix the referents of words, thereby giving 'life' or content to expressions. For example, if I order someone to 'go back to the bank!' what makes it the case that I mean the *riverbank* rather than the *money-bank*? The mental fix picture requires that I have some kind of mental grasp of the riverbank (or at least have it in mind) when issuing the order. Wittgenstein warns not to over complicate the situation with extra-linguistic entities, like mental fixes. He thinks we can richly account for the meaning of a word by simply surveying the circumstances surrounding the order—what happened before and after the order was issued? For instance, a friend and I had

⁸ Rorty (1993), p. 348. See also Wittgenstein (1968): "Notes for Lectures on 'Private Experience' and 'Sense Data'", and Wittgenstein (1972): *Philosophical Investigations*.

⁹ Zettel, §191

recently purchased a boat, and in the interests of safety attended a course on maritime practice. Later that day we take the boat out for her maiden voyage, but no sooner have we set sail than I realise we've forgotten life-jackets and flairs. Immediately, I panic and order my shipmate to 'go back to the bank!' Back onshore, we get the gear and I have peace of mind before our jaunt. Equally though, I could have been rushing to the bank to cash a cheque before it closed for the weekend. After leaving the bank, however, I realise I've left my wallet in the bank. I yell to my driver, 'go back to the bank!' In each case I mean something quite specific; but what makes it the case that I mean one thing rather than another, i.e. what discriminates one referent from everything else in the world? The surrounding circumstances do. Make those clear and so too will the meaning of an ambiguous utterance like 'go back to the bank!' be unequivocally clear. There needn't be recourse to things going on in the head (alongside the order). The meaning of an utterance stems from its *use in practice*, where certain things have happened before the utterance and certain other things will follow after it.¹⁰ Semantic value then, stems largely from ones *behaviour in practice*—words get their significance from the activities they are embedded in, not from the grip minds have on referents. It is crucial to note, however, that Wittgenstein is not saying *everything outer, nothing inner*. He is not a behaviourist. Indeed, he thinks it just as misleading to say a meaningful expression is a particular behaviour and nothing besides, as it is to describe one as the sum of expression and something else in the head.¹¹

It is just as misleading to say that there is just the surface and nothing underneath it, as that there is something below the surface and that there isn't just the surface.¹²

The purpose is *deflationary*—Wittgenstein is not out to replace one theory with another. He leaves room for something to be going on in the head¹³ but wants simply to deflate or downplay its philosophical importance. The claim is that meaning cannot be clarified by looking to mechanisms of mind; it is an *intersubjective* phenomena. Which is to say, there are broader sociological constraints at play here.

This thesis is both an exploration of those sociological constraints, and an

¹⁰ I will discuss this idea more in chapter three in terms of what Wittgenstein called the 'stage-setting' of an utterance.

¹¹ *Notes for Lectures on 'Private Experience' and 'Sense Data'*, §303

¹² *Ibid*, §305

¹³ See Stern (1991) and Mills (1993) for some of Wittgenstein's positive accounts of mind, (pace his anticipation of *connectionist* models of mind.)

attempt to loosen the grip the *picture of the inner event* has on our thinking. I will use colour language and colour semantics as an example of one way in which we might approach questions of meaning from a more *ambient* point of view—one that looks to roles in *social practice*, rather than states in a brain-box. I have chosen colour concepts because they are good examples of the kind of sensation concept Wittgenstein thought most vulnerable to misleading forms of explanation;¹⁴ explanations of the form—the meaning of the word ‘red’ depends on the language user representing the referent of that colour. (As though the utterance only has meaning because it is accompanied by this representational fix—the fix that refers words to the world). Ultimately, chapter three will show language and activity to be thoroughly interwoven.

Chapter Four will show how the grammar of everyday language distorts the relationship between agent and world, words and world. I will show the MFR to be a symptom of this grammatical confusion.

Chapter five will pose a further challenge to the MFR, in terms of its intentional component (where subjects direct themselves toward objects ‘out-there’ via mental content). Martin Heidegger’s work in *Being and Time* will be authoritative here. Heidegger argues that agent and world are not separate (pace the MFR) but co-dependent or *co-terminus*, mutually defining one another. He claims that the world is *already meaningful*, i.e. that it has already been structured by the historical practices of a particular form of life. Which means that agents do not enter into (intentional) commerce with a brute meaningless world of undifferentiated things, but are embedded within an *already meaningful world*. Heidegger’s philosophy also mitigates or *deflates* the explanatory force of *sense-making mental fixations*. The idea is that, if sense has already been historically made for us (i.e. if the world has already been made-sense-of), then what role is there for sense-making representations to play? Agents do not need to individually make sense of the world, because it has already been made sense of. Intentional agency is not something that happens because of sense-making representations in the head, but is a product of an already meaningful world.

¹⁴ *Blue and Brown Books*, pp.30-31

CHAPTER TWO

EARLY AND LATE VERSIONS OF THE MENTAL FIX REQUIREMENT A PRELIMINARY TO THE TRANSITION FROM MINDS TO PRACTICES

PART I PLATO'S TWO-WORLD THEORY OF EVERYTHING

2.1. INTRODUCTION: PLATO'S STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE

Plato's two-world theory claims there are two orders of things in the universe—*Lower-world particulars*, and *Upper-world Forms*. Lower-world particulars become what they are by participating in Upper-world Forms.

[There is] no other way by which anything can come to be what it is than by the participating which it does in the proper form of each of the Forms in which it participates.¹

Plato's theory of language piggy-backs this ontology.

Then shall we start by following our usual procedure? You know that we always postulate in each case a single form for each set of particular things, *to which we apply the same name*.²

In each case, meaning—*ontological* in the first instance (i.e. the meaningful presence or being of a thing), and *linguistic* in the second (i.e. the meaning of an utterance), is grounded in the Upper-world. The Forms make other things (bits of the world or words) intelligible/meaningful. Thus the ontological theory also plays a semantic role—the story of what makes objects the things they are, at the same time sets the possible referents language can refer to. For Plato, the ontological question of *what makes some thing X the thing it is?* is at the same time a semantic one of *what gives a thing X the right to be called by the word 'X'?*³

2.2. PLATO'S TWO-WORLD ONTOLOGY: THE ONE OVER MANY PRINCIPLE

Starting from the premise that the universe was made up of two orders of things—Forms and sensible particulars, (each of which inhabits a different realm),⁴ Plato developed a comprehensive ontology of the world. The Forms stood as archetypes

¹ *Phaedo*, 101c. All textual evidence comes from the Cooper and Hutchinson (1997) translations.

² *Republic* 596, emphasis added

³ See Bestor (1978) and (1980). Dr. Bestor was among the first to uncover this tandem ontological/semantic thesis.

⁴ *Republic* 509e-511e, see also 517b-c.

that particulars bore resemblances to—things in the Lower-world bear resemblances to the Forms they *participate* in.⁵ The Forms give being to the particulars that participate in them.⁶ Basically, everything in the Lower-world is dependent on (or derives its existence from) the stable and unchanging inhabitants of the Upper-world.⁷

A particular thing may cease to be, but not the universal property that the particular thing embodies. The universal is thus separate from the particular, beyond change, never passing away.⁸

The Forms are the timeless essences that underlie concrete reality, giving it form, structure and meaning.⁹ A *just* act or *beautiful* thing, for example, become what they are because they participate in the Forms Justice and Beauty respectively.

And beauty and good itself and all the things that we thereby set down as many, we set down according to a single form for each, believing that there is but one, and call it the 'being' of each.¹⁰

This is Plato's *essentialist doctrine of particulars*—a lower-world particular comes to 'be what it is by participating in' a certain Form, 'there is no other way by which anything can come to be what it is than by participating' in a Form.¹¹ Beautiful things are beautiful because they partake of the Form 'Beauty'.¹²

[I]t is beautiful for no other reason than because it partakes of or associates with the Form Beauty.¹³

For Plato, the Forms were the foundation of the world; disclosing everything we perceive in the sensuous realm. Everything we sense is governed by them, and ontologically, can be traced back to them. This is why Plato thought contemplation of the Forms the ultimate goal of philosophical inquiry—they bed-rocked all knowledge claims, adjudicating between right and wrong, just and unjust etc.

2.3. PLATO'S EPISTEMOLOGICAL THEORY:

On the basis of this split in the universe, Plato developed an elaborate epistemology

⁵ *Ibid*, 476d, see also *Phaedo*, 101c

⁶ *Republic* 507b

⁷ *Ibid*, 479a-d

⁸ *Ibid*, 507c. See also *Phaedo* 78d-e.

⁹ *Ibid*, 507b-509c

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 507b

¹¹ *Phaedo*, 101c

¹² *Ibid*, 76d; see also 100d-e, 105b-c

¹³ *Ibid*, 101c, see also, 101a-d

of how the inhabitants of each realm are known.¹⁴ The material particulars of the Lower-world are detected by the physical sense organs of the body—the five physical senses. While the immaterial universals of the Upper-world are grasped by the intellect or ‘eye of the soul’.¹⁵ The physical object of the Lower-world is ‘held’ by the physical senses, while the immaterial Form is ‘held’ by the eye of the soul.¹⁶ Taken together, Plato’s epistemic theory holds that knowing a lower-world object (whether making a judgement about it, or talking about it, or even the very act of perceiving it) involves the mind or ‘soul’ fixing upon the Form that discloses it. Plato thought an act of comparison delivers a judgement on an object—the intellect compares or weighs the degree of likeness the Lower-world object bears to an Upper-world standard. That is, the eye of the soul or intellect fixes upon a Form and then passes judgement on the particulars participating in that Form, thereby judging the degree of beauty or justness, say, relative to the purity of the Forms they bear resemblances to.

2.4. PLATO’S THEORY OF PERCEPTION

Plato’s perceptual theory rides on the back of his epistemic thesis. Again we have the idea that the intelligibility of our (Lower-world) percepts depends on the fix the mind/soul has on a certain Form. This fixation enables agents to make comparisons with it. Indeed, it is only by comparing a Lower-world thing *X* to the Form *X* that we come to recognise it as an *X*-thing.

[B]efore we ever began to see or hear or otherwise perceive things we must, it seems, have possessed knowledge of the equal itself, *if we were going to refer the equal things of our sense-perceptions to that standard, conceiving that all such objects are doing their best to resemble it*¹⁷...If those objects exist which are always on our lips, a [Form] beautiful and a [Form] good and all reality of that sort, and *if it is to that that we refer the content of our sense-perceptions, thereby recovering what was our aforetime,*¹⁸ and compare our precepts thereto.¹⁹

Perception/knowing is a two stage process—first one seizes upon a physical object

¹⁴ see *Phaedo*, 74a-75d

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 65e, 66e

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 75b, 76d-e

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 75b

¹⁸ This is a reference to Plato’s *Theory of Recollection*. It was first introduced in the *Meno* (80e-86c) where he claimed that, prior to one’s birth into a physical body, one is directly acquainted with the Forms. When we are (re)born, however, we forget that acquaintance. Plato thought philosophy one way in which we could ‘recollect’ that knowledge.

¹⁹ *Phaedo*, 76d-e, emphasis added

with the physical sense organs, the deliverances of which are compared to what the eye of the soul knows of the relevant Form(s). So it is by way of comparison that objects are known—if the object measures up to the Form, then the intellect issues a judgment that the pot is *beautiful*, say, or an act *just* etc. That is, if there is a sufficient likeness between particular and Form, then the object is judged beautiful, just, virtuous etc. Crucially, words are meaningless and perceptions unintelligible until the agent fixes upon the relevant Form; grasping the physical object alone is not enough.²⁰ The very act of perceiving something depends on the intellect refers the brute undifferentiated sensations it receives from the environment to certain Forms, thus rendering them intelligible. And the same goes for language—only on the basis of the aforementioned comparison do we ascribe the predicates of beauty, justice, virtue, courage, heaviness, largeness, equality etc.²¹

In sum, the act of seeing something as something involves a comparison between object and Form, i.e. sensations are made-sense-of relative to the Forms.²² The soul or intellect performs that comparison, making sense of an object by weighing its degree of (dis)likeness to the Form that gives it being. This is the perceptual thesis. The tandem epistemic thesis also holds that knowledge involves mentally grabbing hold of or fixing upon the inhabitants of the Upper-world. The linguistic corollary of this epistemic/perceptual theory is that, provided there is enough of a likeness between a Lower-world item to an Upper-world item, then not only will the object be perceived in a certain way (as beautiful, virtuous etc.), but also *spoken* of in a certain way. That is, the object has the right to be called by a certain name. In the next section we will see how the mental fix requirement extends well beyond acts of perception and conception, into the semantic domain of *reference*.

2.5. PLATO'S LINGUISTIC THESIS: THE TWO-WORLD THEORY OF NAMING

—THE ONTOLOGICAL ROUTE TO SEMANTICS

Alongside his two-world ontology and corresponding theory of perception, Plato developed a theory of language that marries his theory of the Forms—i.e. his theory of the ontological workings of the cosmos (what gives being to things), with the

²⁰ I would imagine these unintelligible percepts to be comparable to those of patients suffering from certain kinds of *agnosia*. Typically, such patients lose the ability to recognise the character of everyday objects. They can see things, but cannot discern them *as* a kettle, *as* a table, *as* a pen etc. So while they see something, they do not ordinarily see it *as* something.

²¹ More on Plato's semantic theory in section 2.5.

²² Later, in Part II, I will frame Locke's *Theory of Ideas* as an *internalisation* of these transcendental sense-makers.

workings of language (what does the meaning of a word consist in?).

When you call all admirable things admirable, bodies, for example, or colours, shapes and sounds, or practices, is it with nothing in view that you do so each time?²³

The reason for *naming* particulars after Forms is that they have an immanent character defined by their Form.²⁴

Things bore their names by virtue of participating in those Forms [that disclosed them]²⁵

The semantic relation mirrors the ontological one, i.e. language mirrors reality.²⁶ That is, particular *X* has the particular kind of existence that it has in virtue of a certain causal relation holding between it and a certain Form. The semantic aspect of this ontological relation involves a particular *X* being ‘loaned out’ the proper name of Form *Y* in virtue of the above causal relation. There are two kinds of participation relation at play here—one causal the other semantic.

- *The Causal Relation*—particulars have a certain character defined by the Form they participate in:

[There is] no other way by which anything can come to be what it is than by the participating which it does in the proper Form of each of the Forms in which it participates.²⁷

- *The Semantic Relation*—particulars are loaned the names of the Forms they participate in:

Each of the Forms exists, and the other things which come to have a share in them are *named* after them.²⁸

[T]here are certain forms from which these other things, by getting their share of them, *derive their names*—as, for instance, they come to be like by getting a share of likeness, large by getting a share of largeness, and just and beautiful by getting a share of justice and beauty?²⁹

2.6. THE EPONYMY THESIS

Plato puts his ontological theory to further work with his theory of eponymy—proper names pick out or refer to the Form that a group of particulars have in common. They

²³ *Gorgias* 474d

²⁴ *Phaedo* 103e, emphasis added

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 102b

²⁶ More in section 2.8.

²⁷ *Phaedo*, 101c

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 102b, emphasis added

²⁹ *Parmenides*, 131, emphasis added. See also *Republic*, 596—‘As you know, we customarily hypothesise a single form in connection with each of the many things to which we apply the same name.’ And *Parmenides*, 133d—‘it is by partaking of them that they come to be called by their various names.’

name that ‘something the same’ that causes a group of particulars to be what they are.³⁰ These names can be further ‘loaned out’ to the many particulars that participate in that Form.³¹ An eponym is ‘loaned out’ to a group of particulars in virtue of their common participation in a certain Form³²—the Form they owe their existence to. Form X causes X_1 to be what it is— X_1 participates in Form X, and it is in virtue of this participation relation that X_1 has the right to the eponym ‘ X_1 ’, i.e. the right to borrow the proper-name of the Form X. The eponymy thesis enables proper names to be applied to things other than the unique Form they name—words are either the *proper name* of some one bit of the cosmos, (i.e. proper names name a Form in a one:one relation); or else the *eponymous name* of several other bits. Proper names name Forms, and these can be loaned to the many other things that also bear a relation to that Form. So a language user first has a grasp on a single nominatum—i.e. a unique Form, and secondarily is able to identify/label designata *sufficiently related* to that nominatum—i.e. other participant objects.^{33,34}

Let us take stock. Objects are caused to be what they are by participating in a certain Form, and it is in virtue of this participation that they have the right to be named after those Forms. Proper-names are ‘loaned out’ to eponyms sufficiently related to the Form the proper-name, names.³⁵ The mental fix component of Plato’s two-world theory holds that the mind (or ‘eye of the soul’) fixes upon Forms that disclose objects in the Lower-world. This fixation plays a tandem epistemic/semantic role—objects are known to be such-and-such an object because we have one eye (that of the soul), on the Form and another eye (the physical ones), on a bit of matter in front of us. The deliverances of the intellectual and physical senses are compared, and judgments made. At the same time we can only speak about that particular thing X, because we have a fix on the Form that discloses the referent. In essence, the epistemic/linguistic thesis is that we fix on an Upper-world Form to both *know* a Lower-world object and to *speak* about it. Language is made up of a system of

³⁰ *Republic*, 596

³¹ *Phaedo* 103a-e

³² *Ibid*, 103e

³³ Bestor 1988, p.48.

³⁴ In this way, the eponymy thesis also serves as a kind of grouping-principle—particulars $X_1, X_2, X_3...X_n$ are tagged as members of the same group in virtue of their common participation in the Form X.

³⁵ For further textual evidence see *Phaedo* 78d-e, 105a. See also:

Timaeus 83c—“Now the name ‘bile’ common to all these varieties, was given to them either by doctors, possibly, or else by someone who had the ability to look at a plurality of unlike things and see in them a single kind that deserves to be called by a single *name*” (emphasis added).

proper-names (that name Forms) and eponyms (that have the right to borrow proper-names because they are sufficiently related to that Form).

2.7. UPPER-WORLD MODALITY AND THE BACK-PASSING PRINCIPLE

At *Phaedo* 105a Plato completes the two-world ontological-epistemic-semantic apparatus with an account of the organisational structures of the Upper-world—the associative relations of *exclusion* and *accompaniment* between Forms are two new additions he makes to his Two-world theory.³⁶ Now the Forms one mentally fixes upon bear relations to certain other forms. And so by corollary, the fix we have on a Form *X* extends to those other Forms *XY* and *XZ* sufficiently related to *X*. Plato discusses this Upper-world modality—i.e. these Form-to-Form relations—in terms of ‘*invariable accompaniment*’³⁷ and ‘*never admitting the presence of*’³⁸—*accompaniment* and *exclusion* respectively.

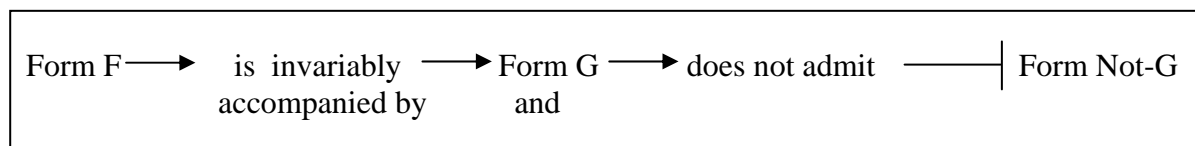


Figure 1: The Formal relations of *Accompaniment* and *Exclusion*.³⁹

A Form, *X* say, may bear several other relations to Forms *Y* and *Z*. These Upper-world relations are *passed back* to the original participants that partake in Form *X*. This is Plato’s new *Back-Passing* apparatus.⁴⁰

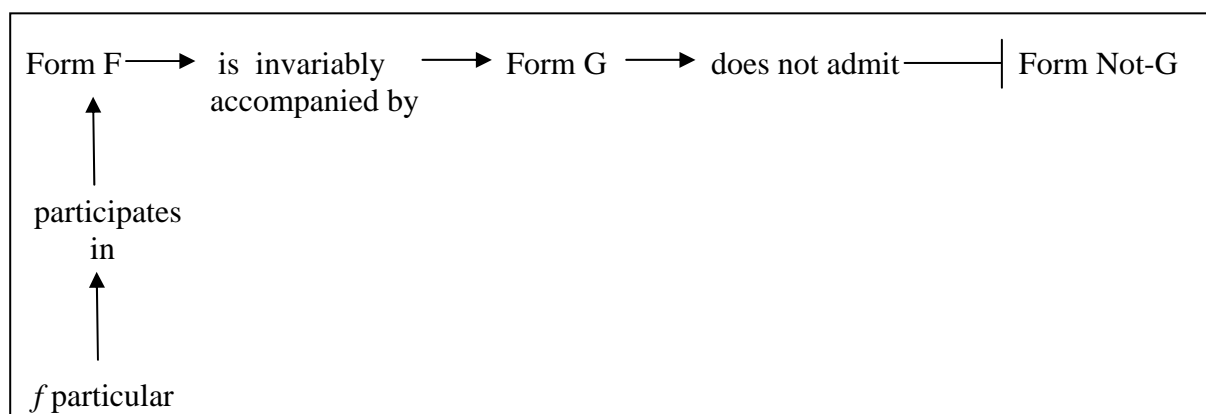


Figure 2: The Back-Passing principle—modal relations are passed back to particulars⁴¹

³⁶ Note here the exclusion and accompaniment relations between Forms are more associative relations than causal, since a Form can never be the cause of another Form. The Forms are eternal and unchanging, and are not caused into existence.

³⁷ *Phaedo* 104d, 105d

³⁸ *Ibid*, 102d-e, 103a, 104b-c, 105a, 106a

³⁹ Bestor (1988) p. 37.

⁴⁰ The back-passing principle was discovered and coined by Bestor (1988), p. 39.

⁴¹ Bestor (1988) p. 38

The participation relation which some particular thing X_1 has to the Form X not only attaches it to that point in the Upper-world, it also attaches it to certain other points in the Upper-world⁴²...[This] attaches the lower-world thing X_1 to whatever other Forms there may be which Form X is itself especially intimately linked with. If the Form X is intimately connected with the Form Y , then simply by participating in Form X the thing X_1 gets attached to Form Y as well.⁴³

The idea is that Upper-world Formal constraints (i.e. the relations Forms bear to other Forms) are percolated down to the particulars that participate in them. So if Form X is invariably accompanied by the Form Y , then this constraint is passed back to the particular X . That is, particular X is also accompanied by (or at least related to) the phenomena Form Y discloses. For example, snow gets its *identity* as snow only by participating in the Form Snow. This is the standard *one-over-many* participation relation—a lower-world particular comes to ‘be what it is by participating in’ a certain Form.⁴⁴ The Form *Snow* is always accompanied by the Form *Cold*. At the same time, Forms always exclude their opposite—in this case the Form *Hot*. Forms are never alloys, they are pure, and can never admit the presence of their negation—‘the Form X always prevents certain other Forms getting too ‘close’ to it in the Upper-world’.⁴⁵ This is the *never-admits-the-presence-of* relation. There are two aspects to this exclusion relation—the Form X neither admits its own negation, Not- X ; nor does the Form X admit the negation of its invariable accompaniment, Not- Y .

Yet snow, if it admits heat, will no longer be what it was, but will either withdraw or cease to exist.⁴⁶

The associative relations of accompaniment and exclusion are passed back to the things that partake in them. A snowdrift partakes in the Form Snow, which is always accompanied by the Form Cold, which never admits the presence of the Form Hot.⁴⁷ Upon the approach of the latter, the former either retreats or perishes—there can never be hot snowdrift.

- *REFINED ONTOLOGICAL THESIS:*

Well, see whether you accept this definition. Not only does a Form not admit its opposite, but if anything is accompanied by a form which has an opposite, and meets that opposite, then the thing which it is accompanied

⁴² *Ibid*, p. 49

⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 50.

⁴⁴ *Phaedo* 101c, see also 100d-e, 101d, 105b-c

⁴⁵ Bestor, (2003), p. 46

⁴⁶ *Phaedo* 103d

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 103d, 104b-c; see also 105c-106b

never admits the opposite of the form by which it is accompanied either.⁴⁸

- *REFINED SEMANTIC THESIS:*

If a Form F is invariably accompanied by the Form G, then the Form F never admits the presence of the Form opposite to its invariable accompaniment, the Form not-G, nor the *predication* of the term opposite to that of its invariable accompaniment, the term 'not-g'.⁴⁹

Exclusion and accompaniment relations are thus passed back the particular referents which partake in the Form Snow.

SUMMARY OF BACK-PASSED GRAMMAR:

On the one hand we have the horizontal *Form-to-Form* relations of the Upper-world being passed-back along the vertical *Form-particular* causal-participation relations. On the other hand, we have proper names naming Forms, and loaning themselves out eponymously, given the above participation relation holds. Indeed, it is through this participation relation that the modality of the Upper-world (i.e. *exclusion* and *accompaniment* relations), are passed back to the participant particulars. In addition to the *ontological character* that is back-passed to participant objects (i.e. the kind of *presence* an object has), a corresponding grammatical or logical character is also passed back. The possibilities that a Form has for combining with other Forms are duplicated not only in the combinatorial possibilities of their participant objects, but also in the grammatical possibilities of the names they loan out. Proper names and eponyms reflect the modality of the Upper-world by standing in for objects that have had causal constraints percolated down to them from the Upper-world.

2.8. EPILOGUE: THE PROMISE OF EPONYMY AND THE BACK-PASSING PRINCIPLE FOR PLATO

Having hung his epistemic and semantic theses on the uniquely human ability to fix upon the Forms (that gave being and meaning to things), this would have likely promised a new way of examining the world for Greek philosophy. Plato's ontological and semantic theses drew intimate links between language and world; each shared a common structure patterned by the Upper-world. The emerging idea was that words represented or mirrored the structure of the world by standing in for the Form that structured that world. This idea held the fledgling promise of one being able to

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 105a

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 105a, emphasis added

examine the nature of the world through the structure of language. Here's the argument:

1. The world is Form-ally structured,
2. Proper names stand-in for Forms (one Form:one proper name) and are 'loaned out' to particulars that participate in the Form the proper name names.
3. The logic of these names is patterned on the modality of the Forms

Therefore, 4. The logic of these proper names/eponyms mirrors Upper-World modality.

Proper names and eponyms *name* or *refer* to Forms that disclose bits of the world. Combinations of names represent certain states of affairs in the world, as structured by those Forms. That is, eponyms are loaned out to objects that participate in the Forms that give them being, and the grammar of those names reflects the combinatorial possibilities (or modality) of the Forms they name. That is, lower-world referents are patterned on the modality of the Upper-world. So not only does the causal structure of the Lower-world reflect Upper-world modality,⁵⁰ the logical structure of the language (that refers to this lower-world) also reflects those Upper-world modal relations. Sentences then, can serve as models reality by virtue of a similar correspondence between its grammar and the structure of the world.

Compare Wittgenstein's early work in the *Tractatus*—the sense/meaning of a name is set by nature. That is, the correct use of a name is suited by nature, because words *picture* the world.⁵¹ The way in which the parts of the proposition are combined—the structure of the proposition—depicts a possible combination of elements in reality, a possible state of affairs.⁵²

The World consists of things (objects) standing in certain relations to one another. The relations that exist between objects are mirrored by the relations

⁵⁰ It is critical to note that these modal relations are all of the Upper-world, not the Lower-world, since the Lower-world is a world of *becoming*—it is a distinctly *Heraclitean* world of flux (there can be no essence or necessity in the realm of flux. Bestor underlines this point.

Some lower-world sensible particular may *appear* as if it has modal properties (a drift of snow is necessarily cold). But this is because the modality of the Upper-world continues to be the sole *cause* of all behaviour of the lower-world, via the causal participation relation ... What is remarkable...is that Plato has managed to add in such modalities without having to make lower-world items 'essentially' or 'necessarily' anything. (Bestor, 2003, p. 53)

⁵¹ This stands in stark contrast to Wittgenstein's later philosophy of language where the correctness of names is set by convention and agreement. His later philosophy conceived language/meaning as something *autonomous*, governed by the customs and norms of those in the habit of using language to do certain things. I will expand on this notion of autonomy more in chapter three.

⁵² paraphrased Monk (1990), p. 118

between the symbols of a proposition.⁵³

The sense [or meaning] of a proposition is its agreement and disagreement with the possibilities of existence and nonexistence of states of affairs.⁵⁴

The possible relations objects/referents can enter into with one another (i.e. the possible states of affairs these objects/referents can enter into), is reflected in the logical possibilities of language. That is, 'the possibility of propositions is based on the principle of substitution of signs for objects, i.e. the replacement of objects with signs'.⁵⁵

The Upper-world imposes on the Lower-world a framework words can refer in. This early version of the MFR clearly involves a close co-ordination between language and world. The mental fix the eye of the soul has on a Form links words to reality by orientating the mind toward the referents it has disclosed. That is, the mind can grab hold of (referent) objects because of its prior fix on the Form that disclosed it. Crucially, language and meaning are thought to work on the basis of something outside the practices of using language. I think Plato's semantic theory to be among the earliest versions of the MFR, and indeed a *precedent* or *predecessor* to many subsequent philosophies of language.

PART II

COLLAPSING THE TWO-WORLD THEORY:

2.9. LOCKE'S NEW WAY OF IDEAS

—THE WHOLESALE RELOCATION OF MEANING TO MIND

John Locke's *New Way of Ideas* shifted the semantic fulcrum away from things outside the epidermis (i.e. the Forms) toward things inside it. For Plato meaning hinged on the Forms, now *Ideas in the head* are the new axis of meaning. Crucially, however, questions of *meaning* are still played out in terms of the MFR. Only now, instead of fixing upon transcendental entities when perceiving things or using language, Locke pioneered the idea (along with the likes of Rene Descartes) that representational entities in the head *alone* were the medium by which agents grasped objects in the world and spoke about them. Critically, the representing

⁵³ *Ibid*, 129

⁵⁴ *Tractatus*, 4.2

⁵⁵ *Tractatus* §3.22, paraphrased Monk (1990)

subject exists independently of the *object* it represents; mental/representational content was thought to bridge the mind's relation to the world. That is, agents are linked to external objects via internal representations—agents connect with objects via mental content that represents those objects. The semantic corollary of this picture is that, not only do subjects relate to objects via this representational content, they also speak about them via that content—words name objects via that content. This later version of the MFR moves away from Plato's *transcendental reference*, to a *representational reference*. Diane Proudfoot terms this version of the MFR the *act-content-object* picture.

Traditional accounts hold that reference [between word and world] consists in a relation between the mind and an object; the relation is effected by a mental act and mediated by internal mental contents (internal representations).⁵⁶

Once again we strike the idea that a mental act fixes the relation between subject and object. Plato thought the mental act was directed toward the Forms, whereas Locke thinks the mental act works upon the mind's own representational ideas. The critical difference concerns what subjects first fix upon before grasping referents. Locke thought the subject makes meaningful contact with objects in the world via mental content that fixes upon those objects. This mental fix sets the basic relation between agent and world. Hubert Dreyfus describes this subject-object relation as one mediated by 'mental meanings' such that this mental content gives intelligibility to everything people encounter.⁵⁷ Here the brain makes sense of what the senses deliver.

[I]n order for us to perceive, act, [speak about] and, in general, relate to objects, there must be some content in our minds—some internal representation...that enables us to direct our minds toward each object...this mental content gives intelligibility to everything people encounter...the basic relation of mind to the world is a relation of a subject to an object by way of mental meanings.⁵⁸

The philosophical task is still twofold—first, how do we relate to the world? Which entities connect us to the world? And second how do we meaningfully talk about the world? How do words stand for things in the world? Locke, like Descartes before him and countless philosophers after him, have worked to figure out which aspects of consciousness connected us to the world. Wittgenstein was very critical of this idea

⁵⁶ Proudfoot (2002), p. 331

⁵⁷ Dreyfus (1991), pp. 2-3

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 2-3, 5

that subjects have to perform certain mental acts before engaging with the world.⁵⁹

2.10. LOCKE'S EPISTEMIC THESIS

In Book II of his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke claims subjective perceptual structures give *form to or make sense of* sensations. *Ideas* enable subjects to cognise or conceive of objects. We therefore know the world behind a veil of ideas.

To ask at what time a man has first any ideas is to ask when he begins to perceive: having ideas and perception being the same thing...to inquire after the beginning of mans ideas is the same as to inquire after the beginning of his soul⁶⁰

Locke makes the crucial link here between ideas and perception—all perception is mediated by ideas. That is, the first moves subjects make toward discriminating anything, 'rests upon the groundwork of the Ideas that he himself hath'.⁶¹ We perceive the world via our representations of it; we don't perceive the world-in-itself as such, but know it via the fix we have on it thanks to the *ideas* we represent it with. These ideas make our experience intelligible, bestowing meaning or intelligibility upon everything we encounter. Ultimately, these mental meanings enable us to *relate, know, intend* and *speak* about the world. If one were deprived from acquiring these ideas then one could not even so much as make sense of certain experiences, (like those of colour or taste for instance).⁶² The claim is that the *Idea* of an object determines the meaningful experience of that object.⁶³ We cognise things under *aspects*, such that seeing something involves seeing it as something—the 'as' is mediated by representational content. For example, I see four metal poles and a piece of wood as a chair; a transparent cylinder as glass; a flat length of metal as a knife etc. The simple seeing of simple properties like a length of metal, a bit of wood, a transparent cylinder (which Locke terms *simple ideas*)⁶⁴ are combined together into the more *complex Idea*⁶⁵ of chair, glass or knife. Prior to that synthesis (and subsequent fix we have on the referent, i.e. the knife) we can have no cognisance of the meaning of that object.

⁵⁹ See Wittgenstein (1968), §275, 279, 286, 309, 321, 313, 319

⁶⁰ Locke (1975), II.i.9

⁶¹ *Ibid*, II.i.24, III.i.2.

⁶² *Ibid*, II.i.6; See also III.iv.16

⁶³ *Ibid*, II.i.1

⁶⁴ *Op. Cit.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, II.xii.1

2.11. LOCKE'S LINGUISTIC THESIS

The above epistemic thesis also delivers a corresponding thesis of how language works. Here Locke pairs representational faculties with linguistic abilities—minds represent bits of reality and attach words to those representations, rendering them expressible to others.⁶⁶ Objects impress upon the senses, and are represented with *ideas*,⁶⁷ which can then be synthesised with others to make more complex ideas.⁶⁸ These ideas can be encoded into language and communicated to others. So for an act of communication to be pulled off, minds must be able to fix upon the referents of words—mental representations/Ideas fulfil that role. The meaning of a word lies in its *reference* to a certain piece of reality via a certain Idea representing that piece. Words are attached to Ideas that fix upon the referents of utterances. Language is thus a system of signs for Ideas that represent bits of the world. The claim here is that *minds make language work*. That is, language use is primarily a mental matter because the word-world relation is mediated by the minds Ideas. The difference between speaking meaningfully and not, rests on what is happening in the mind. Parrots, for example, can make articulate noises, but their squawks don't signify or mean anything. Just having its 'organs so fashioned as to be fit to frame articulate sounds',⁶⁹ is not enough to produce meaningful language. Minds make all the difference—representative engines that fix upon the world, furnishing the ideas words attach to. Parrots, it is presumed, have no such engine. Ideas alone enable agents to distinguish one thing from another, i.e. discriminate referents, or better, to mean one thing and not another. The semantic content of a word, therefore, depends on the mental fix the agent has on a certain referent. Locke thinks that if we are to pull off any kind of communication whatsoever, we have to be able to construct an internal representation of the things/events our words are about, and then attach words to those representations.

Besides articulate sounds, therefore, it was further necessary that he should be able to use these sounds as signs of internal conceptions, and to make them stand as marks for the ideas within his own mind, whereby they might be made known to others.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, III.ii.2

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, II.ii.1

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, II.xii.1

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, III.i.1

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, III.i.2

To 'use...sounds as signs of internal conceptions'⁷¹ requires a mind to make the association between intentional/representational content and sound; minds associate particular ideas with certain noises and squiggles to make them meaningful. The association of intentional content with public sign is carried out in a private medium.

Man, though he have a great variety of thoughts...yet they are all within his own breast, invisible and hidden from others...those invisible ideas, which his thoughts are made up of, might be made known to others...Thus we may conceive how words...came to be made use of by men as the signs of their ideas.⁷²

The immediate signification or semantic content of a word is the *idea* that grasps the referent—language is *about* the world, but only indirectly so. This is the linguistic corollary of the *veil of ideas* argument.⁷³

The use, then, of words is to be the sensible marks of ideas, and the ideas they stand for are their proper and immediate signification.⁷⁴

[W]ords, in their primary and immediate signification, stand for nothing but the ideas in the mind of him that uses them...That then which words are the marks of are the ideas of the speaker; nor can anyone apply them as marks, immediately, to anything else but the ideas that he himself hath.⁷⁵

All words are public signs of private ideas.⁷⁶

Locke's version of the MFR typifies the ongoing tendency to pair a representational apparatus with a linguistic one—certain mental processes run alongside language use, accompanying every utterance making it meaningful. The mind makes an association between a squiggle or noise and some particular intentional content, rendering the noise or squiggle *meaningful*.

2.12. THE REIFICATION OF LOCKE'S IDEAS

—NEUROPHYSIOLOGICAL MODELS OF REPRESENTATION

Paul Churchland's (1986) article *Some Reductive Strategies in Cognitive Neurobiology* stands as something of a prolegomena for contemporary

⁷¹ *Op. Cit*

⁷² *Ibid*, III.ii.1, emphasis added

⁷³ See II.i.9

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, III.ii.1

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, III.ii.2

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, III.i.5

representational theories of mind.⁷⁷ To the problem of how brains represent the world, he introduces neurological 'state-spaces'.⁷⁸ The idea is that certain state-space positions, between and within various populations of neurons, *represent* certain things and states of affairs. Churchland envisions his state-space hypothesis to have the resources to fully reduce a variety of cognitive phenomena (like language use and colour perception) to intersections of certain nerve fibres in a *laminar* or 'layered' cortex.

2.13. THE LAMINAR CORTEX

The human cortex has six layers, each of which are connected by a large number of nerve fibres, within and between layers.⁷⁹ The cortex is further divided into a number of sub-areas or *topographic maps* that correspond to different aspects of sensory and motor activity.⁸⁰ The body's tactile surfaces, for example, are represented by certain topographic maps. Likewise, the visual cortex, olfactory cortex and auditory cortex. Taken together, the topographically organised laminar cortex makes for a powerful representational system. Churchland describes such systems as *representational state-spaces*.⁸¹

2.14. CHURCHLAND'S EPISTEMIC THESIS: STATE-SPACE REPRESENTATION

State-spaces represent things in both sensory and motor state-spaces, and the coordination of several neuronal populations (across different sensory and motor maps), allows an organism to richly represent the world.

The basic idea...is that the brain represents various aspects of reality by a *position* in a suitable *state space*; and the brain performs computations on such representations by means of general *coordinate transformations* from one state space to another.⁸²

The brain represents the world by mapping it onto various state-space positions. Computations are performed on those vectors to integrate or coordinate their positions into a coherent/unified representation. The co-ordination of discrete state-space positions (i.e. the integration of different topographic maps) transforms

⁷⁷ See also Patricia Churchland (2002); Paul Churchland (2006) and (2007),

⁷⁸ Paul Churchland (1986), p. 279

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p. 28

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p. 281

⁸¹ *Ibid*, p. 289

⁸² *Ibid*, p. 280

disparate inputs into unified patterns of activation, which ultimately terminate in an output vector—an appropriate motor response for example.⁸³

I therefore propose the hypothesis that the scattered maps within the cerebral cortex, and many subcerebral laminar structures as well, are all engaged in coordinate transformation of points in one neural state space into points in another, by the direct interaction of vertically connected topographic maps. Their mode of representation is state-space position; their mode of computation is coordinate transformation; and both functions are simultaneously implemented in a *state-space sandwich*.⁸⁴

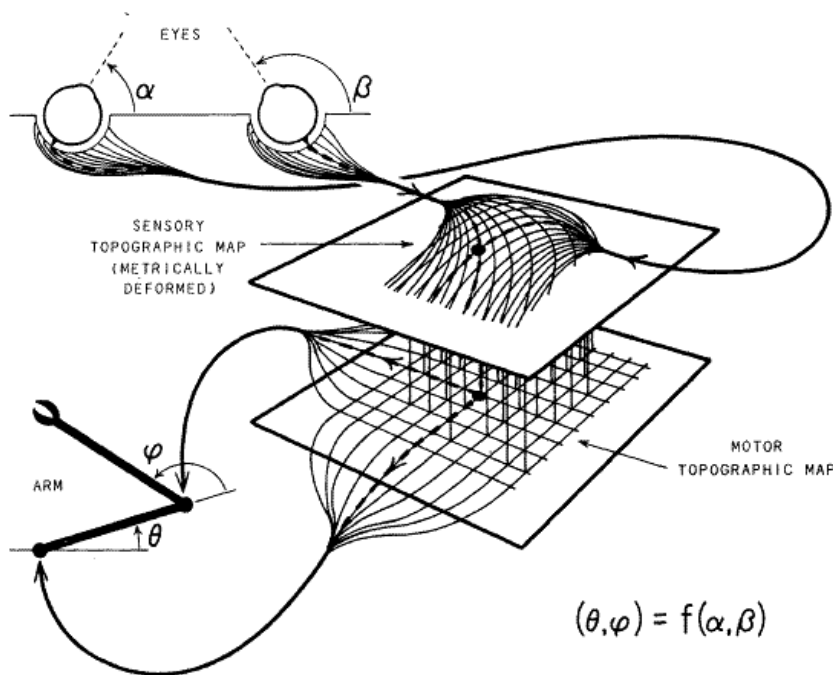


Figure 3: Churchland's representational state-space-sandwich.

Again, the brain represents the world through certain patterns of activation across different populations of neurons. Environmental information is mapped or represented by certain patterns of activation between and within a multi-dimensional state-space.⁸⁵ The activation thresholds of a given neural population are set by *trained activation weights*—“training produces a set of *partitions* across activation spaces of sensory and motor layers.”⁸⁶ Training shapes the activation tendencies of certain populations of neurons, by wiring or weighting proto-type activation patterns

⁸³ Ibid, p. 288

⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 290-291

⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 290

⁸⁶ Churchland (1993), p. 671

These weights set the *receptive* and *projective* fields of neurons, i.e. the partitions of one level of neurons can excite or inhibit the activation patterns at another level.

A typical neural network consists in a population of input or 'sensory' neurons $\{I_1, \dots, I_n\}$ which projects their axons forward to one or more populations of hidden or 'processing' neurons $\{H_1, \dots, H_m\}$, and $\{G_1, \dots, G_j\}$ which project their axons forward to a final population of output or 'motor' neurons $\{O_1, \dots, O_k\}$. The network's occurrent representations consist in the several activation patterns across each of these distinct neuronal populations...It is this particular pattern or vector, *qua* unique combination of values along each of the n axes, that carries the relevant information, that has the relevant '*semantic content*'... [The coordinate transformation task] is carried out at each stage by the configuration of synaptic 'weights' that connect each layer of neurons to the next layer up.⁸⁷

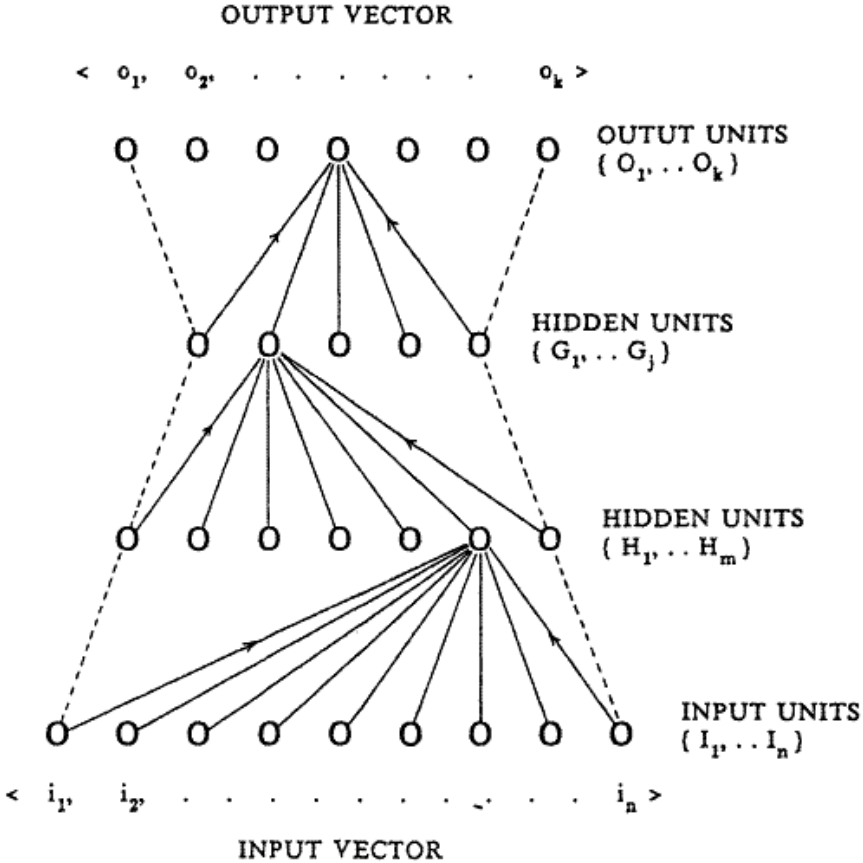


Figure 4: An example of the activation patterns and weighting of several neuronal populations. These unique patterns of activation carry the relevant information about the world (i.e. fix upon bits of it), and thus fix the semantic content of an utterance about a certain part of that world.

Churchland thinks his state-space hypothesis goes some way toward showing how

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p. 667, emphasis added

brains represent things in the world. His next question is whether or not it has the resources for a *state-space theory of semantics*?

We have seen how a representational scheme of this kind can account...for a number of important features of motor control, sensory discrimination, and sensorimotor coordination. But has it the resources to account for the so-called higher cognitive activities, as represented by *language use*...the representational and computational capacities of a system of state spaces interacting by coordinate transformations could feasibly be used to articulate models adequate to the so-called 'higher' forms of cognitive activity.^{88,89}

2.15. CHURCHLAND'S LINGUISTIC THESIS: STATE-SPACE SEMANTICS

Churchland puts his state-space theory to further work as the vehicle of semantic content. Neural representations—i.e. the coordination of several vector positions across different neuronal populations, do double duty as both *representational* and *semantic* engines. There are two factors at play here—first, particular things are represented by particular patterns of activation across different state-spaces (a certain region of activation represents a certain thing or state of affairs in the world). Secondly, words name/refer to things and states of affairs in the world via these representations. The semantic content of a word, then, can be identified with certain patterns of activation in a multidimensional state-space. Notice we're basically dealing with the same dog-legged picture of language that Locke was. And while terminology may have changed, we're still dealing with the same representational version of the MFR that Locke was. Only this time instead of *Ideas* doing the work, populations of neurons with different activations weights are.

On neural-network models of cognition, the primary unit of representation, and the primary *vehicle* of semantic content, is the overall pattern of simultaneous activation levels across the assembled neurons of a given population, such as cells in layer four of the primary visual cortex, or the output cells of the motor cortex, or the 'cells' in a given layer of some artificial network model...Any single point in that space will represent, by way of its unique set of n coordinate values, the simultaneous activation levels of each of the cells in the corresponding neural population...a specific activation *pattern* [i.e.] a specific

⁸⁸ Churchland (1993), pp. 305, 306

⁸⁹ See also Patricia Churchland, (1986)—'It is known that the resources of phase space analysis are sufficiently powerful to model the structures and relations of logic and language. That is, logicians have shown (Van Fraassen 1970, 1972, Van Fraassen and Hooker 1976) that linguistic structures and the logical relations between them can be handled simply and elegantly within a geometric framework. *Propositions, for example, are modeled as vector-to-vector transformations.* Hooker has suggested (in correspondence) that it is therefore possible to envision a unified cognitive neurobiology in which logic and the propositional attitudes, characterized in terms of phase spaces, vectors, and matrices, fit in quite naturally with a wider geometric theory of representation and computation. In that event, the psychology of sentential attitudes and reasoning might reduce rather smoothly to neurobiology.' (pp. 456-7, emphasis added).

point in an activation space = the unit of representation.⁹⁰

Crucially, words are still thought to hook onto the world via representations of it. The *epistemic* relation between brain and world is still bridged by mental representations. And likewise the *semantic* relation between word and referent—representational populations of neurons fix upon and distinguish one referent from another, individuating meanings.

2.16. BRAINS MAKE LANGUAGE WORK

Brains make language work by representing the states of affairs words refer to. Again, we have the idea that language use depends on the mental association of words with objects. Representations are the semantic axis the word-world relation turns on—they run alongside or ‘accompany’ language use, giving ‘life’ to the sentence⁹¹—squiggles and noises become meaningful writing and speech because of the neural fix language users have on referents. Language refers to the world via a neurological act of pointing;⁹² i.e. via the neurological fix the language user has on what they are talking about. The task in the following chapter will be two-fold—first, to show why neurological representations are insufficient to fulfil the semantic role they have traditionally been thought to, and second, to show how social practices fulfil that role, and are therefore the true vehicles of semantic content. The alternative I present challenges the long held assumption that learning and using language is primarily a matter of correlating words with objects via mental representations we have of them.

⁹⁰ Churchland (1998), p.6

⁹¹ Wittgenstein, (1969b) *Blue and Brown Books*, pp. 1,3

⁹² Baker and Hacker (1980), p.39

CHAPTER THREE

MEANING IN PRACTICE

DEFLATING THE PICTURE OF THE INNER EVENT

—THE TRANSITION FROM MINDS TO PRACTICES

3.1. WHY STUDY MEANING?

Questions of meaning are not just philosophical questions. They relate to our everyday use of language. People do after all say things, and mean them in certain ways, and intend them to be taken in certain ways. And we do speak about the things and events that happen in the world, so there is a question of how our words relate to the world. To these sorts of question, Wittgenstein pays lip-service to the ‘traditional’ model of meaning outlined in chapter two. The model where minds and mental processes make language work.

What is the meaning of a word?¹

It seems that there are certain definite mental processes bound up with the workings of language, processes through which alone language can function. I mean the processes of understanding and meaning. The signs of our language seem dead without these mental processes...We are tempted to think that the action of language consists of two parts; an inorganic part, the handling of signs, and an organic part, which may be called understanding these signs, meaning them, interpreting them, thinking. These latter activities seem to take place in a queer medium, the mind.²

Wittgenstein’s claim, however, in the *Philosophical Investigations* is that these processes *alone* are not responsible for the functioning of language. He thinks this picture, with its philosophical ramifications (i.e. ‘that there are ‘certain definite’ mental processes bound up with the workings of language’),³ stands in the way of a clear understanding of how language works; i.e. a proper and full understanding of how words mean, and what one is doing when saying something. The purpose of this chapter is to clarify certain misunderstandings this picture has propagated. Granted, however, that mental processes or states of mind do play *some* kind of role in making words mean, I think, we are all too easily tempted to think these processes do *all* the work—that they *alone* make language work. Such *reductive* approaches provide only

¹ *Blue and Brown Books*, p.1.

² *Blue and Brown Books*, p. 3; emphasis added.

³ Op Cit.

part of the story; over-investing the mind/brain with more explanatory force than it can deliver. This chapter will re-evaluate the ongoing (over)investment in minds, and things mental when dealing with questions of how meaning works. Ultimately, clearing away misguided lines of inquiry propagated by the MFR.⁴ We need to survey language along more *ambient* lines to perspicuously see how words accrue significance. This chapter sets out to provide that survey.

In the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein cautions against referential theories of meaning—ones that claim mental references to objects animate language, where the meaning of an expression is the referent it picks out.⁵ These references have traditionally been thought to be forged by a certain *fix* or *grasp* the language user has on the referent. Typically the fix has been thought to be *mental* or *cognitive* in nature; or more specifically, *representational*. The idea is that language users represent the referents of their utterances, thereby endowing otherwise dead noises/scribbles with meaning. That is, dead noises and squiggles come to be meaningful speech and writing (i.e. become part of language) in virtue of the mental fix the language user has on certain referents.⁶ The mental fix an agent has on a referent discriminates it from everything else in the universe, thereby setting down a meaningful referring relation between word and world. Wittgenstein was very critical of this mental fix component common to many epistemologies, and especially its pervasiveness throughout philosophy of language.⁷ I am terming it the *mental fix requirement* (MFR). But this is not just a purely philosophical issue. For even at an everyday level, so called ‘lay-people’ just as readily privilege minds and things mental in everyday parlance. Seemingly innocent phrases like ‘what do you *mean*?’, ‘he didn’t *mean* it like that!’ seem laden with certain concepts of mind relative to the workings of language—a certain act of mind makes it the case that one *means* what they say, or *intend* it to be taken in a certain way. Why do we so naturally think minds do all the work? Why are we so persistently tempted to invoke a representational apparatus when examining questions of meaning? In this chapter I will present a new approach where *social practices* correlate words with referents, rather than minds. This approach will downplay the explanatory currency of the mental fix requirement,

⁴ Questions, for example, of how the mind reaches out to, or represents, the things one is talking about,—as though meaning is not properly and fully understood until we have a precise account of this representational/semantic faculty.

⁵ *Philosophical Investigations*, §1

⁶ See *Blue and Brown Books*, §3

⁷ See especially, *Notes for Lectures on ‘Private Experience’ and ‘Sense Data’*.

deflating the priority of mind relative to the workings of language. The claim is that when one learns a language one learns certain patterns of behaviour—‘it is to grow up to take part in the life of a community, to learn *how to do things with words*’.⁸ The thought is that language use is steeped in *activities* (governed by social practices) where words play different roles according to the *language-games* they are part of. Wittgenstein characterises a language-game as an interplay of *language* and *actions* brought together in certain circumstances.⁹

3.2. THE PRIORITY OF ACTION

—J. L. AUSTIN’S PRELIMINARY DEFLATION OF THE PRIORITY OF MIND

To begin, let us briefly consider J. L. Austin’s (1962) *How to do things with Words* (HTD). This section will be a prologue to Wittgenstein’s final rotation of the semantic axis away from minds to *actions* and *practices*. It is not intended to be a complete reformulation of the traditional picture of meaning (pace the MFR), but only a preliminary to Wittgenstein’s focus on the *act-ness of language*. Austin’s project was to outline a ‘new doctrine, both complete and general, of *what one is doing in saying something*’.¹⁰ Lecture II of HTD begins by questioning the ‘age-old assumption in philosophy...that to say something...is always and simply to state something’.¹¹ As though words are just the outward and audible report of something inner¹²—some kind of mental entity that fixes upon the referents of words. Austin, however, wanted to move away from this view. Favouring instead the idea that ‘to say something is to *do something*’.¹³ But this pulls against our everyday intuitions—‘surely there is something else at play here!’ everyman says, ‘something in the head; a representation of some kind maybe? For instance, if I promise to do something then surely the words must be spoken or intended seriously in order to be taken seriously? Austin replies,

[W]e are apt to have the feeling that their being serious consists in their being uttered as (merely) the outward and visible sign...of an inward and spiritual act: from which it is but a short step to go on to believe or to assume without realising that for many purposes the outward utterance is a description, true or false, of the occurrence of the inward performance.¹⁴

⁸ Von Wright (1993), p. 166. See also *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, Volume II, §296.

⁹ *Philosophical Investigations*, §7

¹⁰ Austin (1963), p. 22

¹¹ Austin (1962), p. 12

¹² *Ibid*, p. 9

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 12

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 9

The 'inward acts' that accompany my utterance make the promise *serious* by their presence, and insincere or unintended by their absence.¹⁵ Immediately, one can see the parallel with the MFR¹⁶—certain inward acts make words mean what they do, by picking out or hooking onto the referents they are referring to. For example, a sentence spoken in Russian is a meaningless series of noises to me. The difference between my not understanding the sentence and someone who understands it, presumably involves the thoughts the sentence evokes as one hears it, for instance—I may be able to parrot a sentence, but there would be no inward act accompanying my parroting, nor my hearing of a sentence. Language use on this picture is a kind of *report*—a report of a state or act of mind. But if we get rid of this 'inward and spiritual act' (i.e. the MFR) then where are we to look for answers to questions like, 'how do words mean?' How are we to approach the question? What is the proper domain of semantics if not in the head? Austin argues that instead of thinking language use a report of inner goings on, think of it in terms of *pulling off an action*. To successfully pull off an action, certain things have to be in place and happen in certain ways.

Besides the uttering of the words...a good many other things have as a general rule to be right and to go right if we are to be said to have happily brought off our action.¹⁷

Austin terms the things that have to be right, *(in)felicity conditions*.¹⁸ Felicity conditions are conventional procedures that have certain conventional effects.¹⁹ They are the rules by which we achieve certain things, i.e. perform certain acts. Infelicity conditions are the various *misapplications* or 'abuses of the rules of those procedures' that prevent the act being pulled off.²⁰ He identifies what 'has to be right and go right' by looking to what can go *wrong*.²¹ This approach sets the criteria for pulling off an action (i.e. a felicitous action) against the infelicities that might prevent that action from being pulled off—that is, the criteria for what counts as the correct application of a rule are set against what counts as an incorrect application of a rule.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p.10.

¹⁶ Austin does not make any claim about meaning, as such. His concern is more with what makes an act of speech 'happy' or *felicitous*, which, while analogous to concerns of meaningfulness, is different from Wittgenstein's concern.

¹⁷ Austin (1962), p. 14

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 15

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 14

²⁰ *Op. Cit.*

²¹ *Op. Cit.* More on this notion of infelicities in section 3.11—Rule-following and the Importance of Infelicities.

Crucially, these conditions are all *publicly scrutable*. If we make this notion of ‘pulling off an action’ the new semantic locus, then we can begin to distance ourselves from the traditional mentalistic criteria that have been traditionally thought to underlie language use.

In Lecture II Austin outlines three criteria for the assessment of the felicitousness of an utterance. These criteria are intended to help one identify what can go wrong with utterances, and therefore what makes them felicitous.

- The *circumstances* for performing the act must be right.²² I cannot, for example, place a bet in a restaurant, but I can in a TAB. Nor can I appoint someone into a position of power outside of a certain ceremony for doing so—I cannot appoint you Grand Dragon outside a Ku Klux Klan ritual for example.
- There must be an accepted *procedure* for performing the act,²³ i.e. a certain mode or method of conducting certain activities. I cannot marry more than one woman—bigamy is not an acceptable practice in this part of the world. Nor can I baptise a dog, or give my boss a written warning. I cannot challenge someone to a duel because this practice no longer exists.
- The *personnel* must be right,²⁴ i.e. the people ‘employed’ must be appropriate for the undertaking. I cannot christen a ship, if I have not been appointed to do so. Nor can I gift a watch that is not mine to bequeath, or confer the status of graduate on a graduande—only the vice chancellor can do that.

If all three conditions are met, i.e. certain personnel are present, in certain circumstances, and act in accordance with certain procedures, then a ‘happy’ or felicitous act of speech has been pulled off. Of course, I could christen my car the ‘SS Money’ and smash some cheap champagne over it, but that would be more of a joke than the christening of a ship—i.e. it would be an ‘unhappy’ christening, but a ‘happy’ act of humour. Or, I could appoint one of my red-neck friends ‘Grand-dragon’ while sitting around in a caravan, but that appointment is just as infelicitous as my attempt to christen my car—nothing of consequence will follow from the act.

By focusing on the infelicities that can veto an act of speech, (as the conditions that make it a felicitous speech-act), Austin has no need for recourse to

²² Austin (1962), p. 8

²³ *Ibid*, p. 14.

²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 15.

anything other than the *total situation* the utterance is issued within—i.e. the *circumstances*, the *personnel* and *procedures*. If one or more of these are lacking (i.e. if the circumstance is not right, or the personnel inappropriate, or procedures not in place), then the act will fail to be pulled off. The performance of utterance and act,

must be issued in a situation appropriate in all respects for the act in question: if the speaker is not in the conditions required for its performance (and there are many such conditions), then his utterance will be, as we call it in general, 'unhappy'.²⁵

Crucially, there is no need to go any deeper (into the head) to clarify how utterances mean certain things, we simply consider the total situation in which the utterance is issued—'the total speech act'.²⁶ Performances like pronouncing a couple man and wife, or christening a ship, or baptising a child are *situation bound* performances—the significance of these speech acts stems from the *total situation* they are issued within. They are not merely the outward effect of something underneath those expressions—something that discriminates the referents of utterances like 'I now pronounce you man and wife' or 'I christen this ship the SS Money'. When we start thinking this discrimination in terms of mental fixes, then language use gets imagined as a kind of mental pointing²⁷—differentiation here consists in a mental act of discrimination. Philosophers (like John Locke and Paul Churchland) who start from this premise, incessantly puzzle over the nature of the connection between mind and referent; and this is what gets one into philosophical trouble. Instead of starting off with a conceptual split between mind and referent, start off with a union between the two.²⁸ That is, instead of premising an argument on a separation between mind and referent, start with the *total situation*—the *circumstances*, *personnel*, and *procedures*—these are the principle determinates of reference. By re-orientating the semantic locus away from minds, we can avoid perplexing over the nature of the relation between subject and world altogether; privileging instead the *situation as a whole*.

3.3. EVERYTHING OUTER, NOTHING INNER?—A DISCLAIMER AND A NOTE ON DEFLATION

By thinking of speaking as a kind of activity, Austin and Wittgenstein are not denying

²⁵ Austin (1963), p. 14

²⁶ Austin (1962), p. 52.

²⁷ *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, Volume I, §12, see also §7

²⁸ I will develop this point further in chapter five.

'inner processes' outright. Each leaves room for something to be happening in the head.

It is just as misleading to say that there is just the surface and nothing underneath it, as that there is something below the surface and that there isn't just the surface.²⁹

When sitting at your desk deciding what to have for lunch, it seems obvious that you are engaged in an act of thinking—an act characterised by certain mental/physiological states and feelings one goes through when weighing options. An explanation of this decision-making process will most likely be couched in terms of subjective and maybe even representational concepts. Wittgenstein and Austin are not denying this—people do sometimes engage with things and situations in this way (i.e. by way of detached reflection). Neither of them have any explicit behaviourist leanings. But what they are denying is the *range* of cognitive phenomena this picture can account for. They are denying the wholesale application of this *picture* of the *inner event*—the idea that certain processes accompanying utterances make all acts of speech felicitous (for Austin) and meaningful (for Wittgenstein). They object to one over generalising this picture of detached reflection. When I intend my promise to be taken seriously, for example, the idea would be that certain mental processes constitute the sincerity of my intention. As though my intending an utterance to be taken in a certain way consists in my being in a certain place mentally—often a representational space where judgments are made and utterances issued from. Consider the following examples—there is a piano being tuned as I have a headache. I say, 'it will soon stop' and mean the piano tuning rather than the headache. What makes it the case that I *mean* one thing and not another? If we generalise the above picture of detached reflection (pace the MFR), one might reply '[y]our meaning the piano-playing consisted in your *thinking* of the piano-playing.'³⁰ Possibly. But how helpful is this mentalistic interpretation really? Is it applicable to this kind of phenomena (i.e. the discrimination of referents)? What if instead of applying this mentalistic picture by default, one looks instead to the *total situation* the utterance was issued within to explain what the difference consists in. Look out to the circumstances to see what my utterance was about—survey what happened before and after the utterance; what people were involved and for what purpose? For

²⁹ "Notes for Lectures on 'Private Experience' and 'Sense Data'", §305

³⁰ *Philosophical Investigations*, §16

instance, prior to the piano-tuners arrival I was working on a rather difficult section of a philosophical paper. A creeping headache had been hindering my progress, and was exacerbated by my fiancés insistence that the piano be tuned before she begun to practice. Reluctantly, I capitulate, and the piano-tuner arrives later that day. With my work at a halt, I gasp to myself, ‘it will soon stop’ and wait for the tuning to end. Consider a further case—I say to a friend, ‘there’s a bull in the field’³¹—what makes it the case that I am warning somebody that there’s a bull in that field, rather than casually remarking on the scenery out of sheer boredom, say, or correcting their oversight while stock-taking, or questioning the truth of their claim that a bull was actually in field? What does my cautioning something consist in? Well, look to the surroundings the utterance is embedded within—the circumstance is a farm, the personnel are myself and friend, and the procedure or purpose was to take a shortcut across a field. Those things are what make my utterance a warning, rather than a bored remark, or stock count, or question; *there is no remainder to be explained*.³² The mistake is to say that there is anything that saying something or meaning something *consists in*.³³ As though there were something below the situation, subtending my action and utterance.

To show what a theory of meaning might look like once I have deflated the applicability of the MFR, I will examine colour predicates. This case study will set a new precedent for how we might re-think meaning along more ambient lines (vis-à-vis our practices for talking about things).

3.4. COLOUR PREDICATES—CASE STUDY

The analysis of sensation words and their meaning was a recurrent theme throughout Wittgenstein’s later philosophy.³⁴ He took sensation words as paradigm examples of certain deep-seated pictures of meaning—specifically, the inner event picture of meaning;³⁵ or as I am calling it, the MFR picture of meaning.

Our teaching of the word ‘red’ (or is meant to connect it) with a particular impression of his (a private impression, an impression in him). He then communicates this impression (indirectly, of course) through the medium of speech...We say here that a name is given to a particular impression.³⁶

³¹ Austin (1962), p.32.

³² See also *Philosophical Investigations*, §183—‘I can walk now’

³³ *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, Volume I;§16

³⁴ See especially *Notes for Lectures on ‘Private Experience’ and ‘Sense Data’* §275, 279, 286, 309, 321, 313, 319.

³⁵ *Blue and Brown Books*, §3.

³⁶ *Notes for Lectures on ‘Private Experience’ and ‘Sense Data’*, §275.

And it was this preoccupation with the shortcomings of the inner event picture that pits Wittgenstein so squarely against referential/representational theories of language (like those of John Locke and Paul Churchland), where words are referred to objects via certain inner events.

3.5. COLOUR PREDICATES VIS-À-VIS MENTAL CONTENT

Subsequent from Berlin and Kay's (1969) cross-cultural study of colour it has become widely accepted (in both philosophical and scientific circles) that colour perception and language are largely the result of pan-human neurophysiological processes.³⁷ Their work is frequently cited as evidence for a fixed number of basic (universal) *colour categories* and, thus, *colour terms*. The prevailing idea is that cognitive physiological categories *fix* the use and meaning of colour terms. Werner and Wooten for example claim 'hue naming has a relatively simple physiological basis.'³⁸

The link between basic colour sensations and their names is congenial and physiologically based.³⁹

The semantics of ordinary color [sic] terms is powerfully constrained by the physiology of the human visual system...our experience of colour shapes the way we describe it; the structure of colour space is not established by convention ... The basic linguistic categories themselves have been induced by perceptual salience's common to the human race...biology determines phenomenology and, in consequence, a piece of semantic structure.⁴⁰

The epigenetic constraints in colour perception are reflected in the verbal colour classifications employed in the language of all cultures thus far studied.⁴¹

In each case the MFR is put to work in terms of neurological constraints. The formation and use of a colour vocabulary here depends on the neurophysiological fix an agent has on such properties. Paul Churchland's state-space hypothesis, for example, argues that the referents of colour terms are set by state-space vector positions. Churchland claims his representational state-spaces render not only the *phenomenological* aspect of colour experience (i.e. the *what-its-likeness* of experience) amenable to neurophysiological substrates, but also the semantic aspect

³⁷ Kay and McDaniel (1978), p. 611.

³⁸ Werner and Wooten (1979), p. 45

³⁹ Boyton & Olson (1987), p. 98.

⁴⁰ C.L. Hardin (1988), pp. xxii; 168, 156

⁴¹ Lumsden and Wilson (1981), p. 45. See also Lumsden, (1985).

of it too.⁴² That is, not only can the experience of redness be decomposed into certain patterns of activation (across various state-spaces), but also the meaning of words like 'red' are likewise dependent on that signature of activation, (they *refer* to colour properties in the world via that inner event). Churchland's state-space 'qualia-cube' (see *Figure 5*) models a representational state-space, where visual sensations of red apples, or brown dogs, or green grass for example, can be mapped onto a three-dimensional axes measuring reflectance information. My experience of redness, for instance, is supposed to turn with my representation of it. And once the co-ordinate positions have been plotted, this sets a further link between my experience (of redness) and my utterance about it. The state-space co-ordinate positions bear the relevant semantic content of utterances like 'pick out the red ones' please' or 'look out for that brown dog' or 'colour in the grass green'.

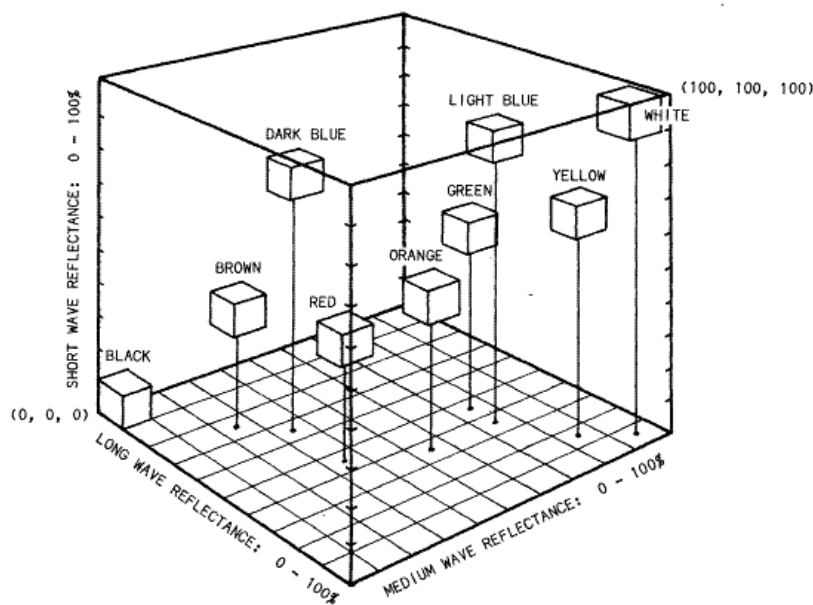


Figure 5: Churchland's qualia cube⁴³

A visual *sensation* of any specific colour is literally identical with a specific triplet of spiking frequencies in some triune brain system...Evidently we can reconceived the cube of Fig. [5] as an internal *qualia cube*. Just think of each axis as representing the instantaneous activity level or spiking frequency of one of three internal pathways for reflectance information...The 'ineffable' pink of one's current visual sensation may be richly and precisely expressible as a '95Hz/80Hz/80Hz chord' in the relevant triune cortical system.⁴⁴

⁴² Churchland (1986), pp. 303.

⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 301.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, pp.301, 303.

It is this particular pattern or vector [of activation]...that carries the relevant information, that has the relevant 'semantic content'.⁴⁵

Ultimately, Churchland identifies semantic content with differential positions in state-spaces.

3.6. COLOUR PREDICATES VIS-À-VIS OUR PRACTICES FOR TALKING ABOUT THINGS

My question is whether or not these private representations (differential state-space vector transformations, for instance) can bear the semantic load they have traditionally been thought to. Wittgenstein's *Beetle-in-the-box argument* spearheads this contention. The argument is an excellent means toward deflating the priority of representational theories of mind relative to questions of meaning.

Suppose everyone had a box with something in it: we call it a 'beetle'. No one can look into anyone else's box, and everyone says he knows what a beetle is only by looking at his beetle.—Here it would be quite possible for everyone to have something different in his box. One might even imagine such a thing constantly changing.—But suppose the word 'beetle' had a use in these people's language?—If so it would not be used as the name of a thing. The thing in the box has no place in the language-game at all; not even as a something: for the box might even be empty.—No, one can 'divide through' the thing in the box; it cancels out whatever it is.

That is to say: if we construe the grammar of the expression of sensation on the model of 'object and designation' the object drops out of consideration as irrelevant.⁴⁶

Think of the beetle as an analogue of the mental fixes that enable agents to discriminate referents. Wittgenstein's point is that the beetle in the box is not discriminating anything at all—it is not doing any work at all because there *already exists a practice for discriminating beetle referents*; i.e. there already exists a practice for using the term 'beetle'. The word-object relation is not bridged by private representational processes, but by *practices*. Inner events do not have a privileged semantic role here; the practice for using the term 'beetle' does—practices correlate words with referents, not beetles in brain-boxes. The thing in the box can neither be cited to justify one's use, nor can it be used to explain the correct use to others.⁴⁷ The argument shows that language does not work on the basis of something inner being correlated with something outer,⁴⁸ (where intervening representations or *beetles*

⁴⁵ Churchland (1993), p. 667; emphasis added.

⁴⁶ *Philosophical Investigations*, §203

⁴⁷ See Alan and Turvey (2001), p. 8

⁴⁸ *Blue and Brown Books*, p. 103

bridge the word-world relation). The practice of using the term 'beetle' does depend on the beetle in the box. That is, the semantic content of the term 'beetle' does not stem from what *accompanies it in the box*. Theories like Churchland's or those of Plato or Locke replicate the circumstances of the *Beetle* argument—the parameters of the 'matchbox' can be taken as those of the mind, the cortex, or the Dividing Line between the Upper and Lower-worlds. In each case the *sense-makers* the mind fixes upon are *hidden*—by the epidermis or material bounds of the Lower-world respectively. Locke and Churchland both share the assumption, that events that once played a role in our experience, are somehow called upon to fill out our current perceptions, such that intentional action and speech are always mediated (to a some degree) by representational content. Here the past is typically thought to be 'stored' as representations which are added on to, or synthesised with, present experience. Dreyfus continues,

The common sense of our tradition is that in order to perceive and relate [and speak of] things, we must have some content in our minds that corresponds to our knowledge of them.⁴⁹

Churchland argues physiological representational structures (i.e. state-spaces) make sense of present experience.⁵⁰ Again we have the idea that language operates on a system of representations—distributed patterns of cortical activity play that role (in the aforementioned case).⁵¹ Wittgenstein's point, however, is that these kinds of representational 'beetle' cannot possibly fulfil such a role—we do not speak about things primarily through having representations of them. Instead of thinking the discrimination of referents vis-à-vis mental content, think of them vis-à-vis our practices for talking about them. Meaning is a normative phenomena—language cannot be explained outside the practice of its use by sub-normative neurological correlates underlying that practice.

3.7. THE NORMATIVE DIMENSION OF LANGUAGE:

The claim is that meaning is something normative and open to view, i.e. something set in practice.

To understand the meaning of an expression is to be able to use it correctly...There is no going *below* the level of rules and the normative

⁴⁹ Dreyfus (1996), p. 7.

⁵⁰ Churchland, (1986), p. 279

⁵¹ See especially Churchland (1993)

practices of their application and invocation to determine what expressions of a language mean...[attempts] to reduce understanding to neurophysiological states is futile...[since] the criteria of understanding cannot be located at the neurophysiological level, but only at the level of normative (rule-governed) behaviour.⁵²

The contemporary prevalence of neurophysiological forms of explanation in particular, have perpetuated the traditional neglect of the more ambient aspects of meaning. The alternative I am presenting argues that references (to colour referents in this case) are not made by neurological events that fix upon them, but by the social practices they are part of. John Cook argues a similar point—he sets up a thought experiment where a group of children are taking part in a ritualised activity that seems to involve the use of colour words.⁵³ The children initially chant along with an instructor who calls out various words in sync with the flashing of differently coloured light bulbs. Eventually, the children learn the correlations by heart, and go on chanting without the instructors lead. The scenario caricatures the idea that ‘our teaching connects the word ‘red’ (or is meant to connect it) with a particular impression of his (a private impression in him).’⁵⁴ It exposes the category mistake at the heart of the MFR, i.e. the conflation of normative criteria and sub-normative constraints on meaning.⁵⁵

Children innocent of any mastery of colours are being taught for the first time to attend to differently coloured light bulbs and then learning to chant the words ‘red’ and ‘green’ and ‘yellow’ in time with the flashing sequence of coloured lights. They learn this as part of a religious chant, to be chanted only on special ritual occasions. And what they learn at chanting practice each day does not carry over to any other of the colour activities we are accustomed to...What they are learning seems much closer to the chanting of musical notes ‘la’ ‘mi’ ‘so’ ‘fa’ in sequence (word salads composed of sacred sounds) than the learning of colour words.⁵⁶

Under the MFR, the chanting of words with flash-bulbs seems to suggest that the children have mastered the use of colour words. A coloured light bulb flashes, is fixed upon, and word attached/chanted with it. The semantic content or reference of their utterances stems from the fix they have on the relevant bulb. Terms like ‘red’ and ‘green’ refer to, or are connected with, red and green things because of a mental act

⁵² Hacker (1980), pp. 61, 62.

⁵³ John Cook (1972) p. 25

⁵⁴ *Notes for Lectures on ‘Private Experience’ and ‘Sense Data’*, §279

⁵⁵ Gilbert Ryle (1973), p. 17. I will discuss the category mistake further in section 4.5. of chapter four

⁵⁶ Cook (1972), pp. 25-26, emphasis added

of pointing. But how is this ‘connection’ between something private and something public supposed to make all the difference? What semantic work could these inner accompaniments be doing? Indeed, can they make any difference at all?

‘But these “expressions” can’t be mere words, noises, which you make; they get their importance only from what’s behind them (the state you’re in when you use them)!’—But how can this state give importance to noises which I produce?⁵⁷

Why should I say the ‘expression’ derives its meaning from [something] behind it—and not from the circumstance of the language game in which it is used?⁵⁸

3.8. LOOK TO SEE

To answer these questions, let us describe the case of the children in terms of the total situation the children are using language within. The difficulty will be to resist the temptation of explaining the situation in terms of meaning-fixing entities in the head. Cook deliberately set up the case of the chanters so that it *seemed* plausible for the MFR to play a role. That is, by merely showing the children a coloured light, and consistently attaching a word to the sensation they have of it, the idea is that they will eventually learn colour words—as though the presence of certain sensate entities accompanying the child’s utterances makes it the case they are about colour rather than musical notes, say. One tends to think here that colour and name are brought together in the head. Cook’s point is to question this presumption—the claim is that the children have not learnt colour words. Neither the circumstances nor procedures are appropriate to make it the case that they have learnt colour words. That is, the correct use of colour words depends on the right circumstances and procedures being in place; if they are lacking, then so too is the felicitousness and meaning of their utterances. But what are the relevant/appropriate circumstances, and procedures for the use of colour words?⁵⁹ Wittgenstein advises we simply look to see⁶⁰—take a look at a number of everyday examples and see what kinds of *circumstances, personnel and procedures* (CPP) are relevant to the use of those words. For instance, a spectator gasps ‘No!’ at the sight of a red light at a cricket

⁵⁷ *Notes for Lectures on ‘Private Experience’ and ‘Sense Data’*, §321

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, §313. See also §303—‘It is, I think, misleading to describe the genuine expression as a sum of the expression and something else’; i.e. the mental fix the language user has on a referent.

⁵⁹ It would, of course, be naïve to suggest there were any essential circumstances, personnel and procedures (CPP) that colour words were used within. We learn and use colour words within many such backgrounds. These backgrounds only bear resemblances to one another. (Cf. Wittgenstein’s notion of ‘*family-resemblance*’—*Philosophical Investigations*, §67—what do all games have in common?).

⁶⁰ *Philosophical Investigations*, §67.

match. What makes it the case that the spectator is *referring to the red* light rather than his empty glass of beer, say? Well, look to the CPP. The circumstance is a sports match. The personnel are the sportsmen, umpires and spectators. The third-umpire procedure holds that a red light means the batsman was safely behind the crease. So far so good. Now look to what happened before and after the utterance—before it, the home side needed four more runs to secure victory, and when the batsman was run-out the spectator threw his beer to the ground and exclaimed ‘No!’ And that’s all we need to say about the meaning of ‘No!’ We do not need to go any deeper here—functional MRI’s are not going to tell us anything more about the meaning of his utterance. Mental fixes are not doing the principle work here, the *background situation as a whole is*—‘the background, against which whatever I was able to express acquires meaning.’⁶¹ If we make the background clear, then the meaning is clear. Here Wittgenstein is highlighting an aspect of our use of words that is typically overlooked because of its familiarity.⁶² In this light it seems quite ludicrous to *reinterpret* the facts with a special semantic apparatus in the head.

Now apply the same technique to the case of the chanters. What are the circumstances of their activity? A Sunday-school type situation where they are participating in a religious activity. Who are the personnel? The instructor taking the class, and the students. And what are the procedures governing their activity? A certain bulb flashes and a certain word is chanted. The coloured light bulbs function as a kind of notation or prompt for what word to chant and when. Before the activity they are quietly ushered into a sacred room (similar to a church presumably) and wait for the session to begin. Afterward they do not talk of the ritual—the activities are sacred and are not allowed to carry over into any other aspect of their daily lives. Given these factors then, the activity of the chanters resembles more the singing of a musical score, than the use of colour words. Remember, the use of colour words depends on certain CPP being in place; if they are lacking or different from the ones we have been socialised into, then so too will the meaning of their utterances. That is, if the children use ‘colour’ words to achieve things vastly different from the things we normally achieve with colour words, then their words will have a different meaning.

⁶¹ *Culture and Value*, p. 23

⁶² Kenny (1996), p. 270—‘The philosophically most important aspects of things are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. (One is unable to notice something—because it is always in plain view before one’s eyes.)’

If we construe the grammar of colour words on the model of object and name (i.e. flash-bulb and 'colour' word), where the designation is set by a special fix the agent has on a referent, then this cannot possibly deliver a rich enough colour semantic.⁶³ When one learns a language, *one masters a practice of use*. One does not first mentally correlate names with objects/sensations, *one learns colour words in connection with certain activities*. But what kinds of action do we perform with colour words? One might advise another of the colour to *shade* a drawing, for example, or *order* another to sort certain objects (like socks) by their colour, or *choose* objects (like curtain) because of their colour. When a child is learning language, it learns a way of operating with words; of *doing* certain things with words. Consider the following cases of *doing things with colour words*:⁶⁴

- (a) *Cautioning* a friend to 'Stop!' at the sight of a red traffic light, or red crossing signal.
- (b) *Reprimanding* them for not pulling over when an ambulance flashes its lights behind them.
- (c) *Colouring* in a picture of a racing car.
- (d) *Sorting* toys by their colour.
- (e) *Picking* objects, like red jelly beans, by their colour.
- (f) *Cheering* when the third umpire flashes a red light.
- (g) *Jeering* the referee's decision to red-card a Manchester United striker.
- (h) *Comparing* shades of blue—'is this blue the same as the blue over there? Do you see any difference?'
- (i) *Mixing* colours to get a certain shade of blue—'It's hard to get this green looking as natural as that fernery'
- (j) *Noting* the changes of a situation or thing by the changes of its colour—'it looks like it's going to turn out fine, you can see blue sky coming through' or 'Banana's are good for baking when they turn black'
- (k) *Framing* a blue piece of furniture with your fingers to isolate and judge it apart from/relative to its background.
- (l) *Noting* the difference a darker shade of blue makes to a room—'the deeper blue makes the room seem smaller and cooler'
- (m) *Ordering/requesting* someone to retrieve an object by its colour—'could you get me six plugs for this component video cable; two red, two blue and two green.'
- (n) *Questioning* what colour a shade is—'Would you say that was more magenta or mauve?'
- (o) *Teaching* someone what a colour means—'When you're mooring a ship, the

⁶³ Ibid, §293

⁶⁴ See *Philosophical Investigations*, §33

red light means port-side'
(p) *Pointing* and *waving* at a red fire truck

We do these, and many other sorts of things with colour. These language-games make up a kind of *semantic field*, within which colour concepts mean what they do *for us*.⁶⁵ If this background (or semantic field) were different, then so too would our colour concepts be different.⁶⁶ The surroundings the concept is normally used within give it its importance.⁶⁷ That is, certain of our concepts (like those of colour) are embedded in a network of customs and institutions that build up and maintain their meaning. If they change, then the concept changes too. In Cook's thought experiment this (normative) background is quite different from the background we are trained within. The children do not participate in any of the activities we normally do with such words.⁶⁸ The activity to which their training leads is very different from the (aforementioned) sorts of activity our training leads to. The purpose of their training is strictly ritualistic, and does not extend beyond the practice of chanting 'red' at the sight of a red bulb. Their 'colour' practices are closely circumscribed by their religious practices. In this light, do you still think the children have mastered the use of colour words simply by correlating differently coloured light bulbs with words? According to the MFR, at least, they have—a child understands the word 'red' when a mental association has been made between the heard word and the colour. The principle criterion for his/her mastery of the word is whether or not he/she says 'red' (or at least has the impulse to do so) when he/she notices something red.⁶⁹ The mental fix the child has on a colour property is supposed to satisfy this 'criterion'.⁷⁰ According to Wittgenstein however, this criterion alone does not make it the case that the child has mastered a colour concept.

If you trained someone to emit a particular sound at the sight of something red, and another at the sight of something yellow, and so on for other colours, still he would not yet be describing objects by their colours.⁷¹

The children do not go on to participate in any of the activities we normally do with colour words. Their training is put to very different uses than ours is, and this

⁶⁵ I will expand on this anthropological idea below in section 3.9

⁶⁶ As they are for many cultures; see below section 3.9.

⁶⁷ *Philosophical Investigations*, §583

⁶⁸ Cook (1972), p. 60

⁶⁹ Russell (1940), p. 29

⁷⁰ In section 3.10 I will explore the incoherence of this notion of a *private criteria*.

⁷¹ *Notes for Lectures on 'Private Experience' and 'Sense Data'*, p.187

ultimately marks their concepts as different from ours. Indeed, their ‘colour’ words are subject to felicity conditions much different from the ones ours are subject to. Their felicities resemble those of students learning to read a musical score, notated with differently coloured light bulbs. Regardless of what’s happening in their brains, if this normative/public background is lacking or different in certain fundamental ways, then of course their ‘colour’ concepts will be different. Indeed, even if a flash-bulb did cause a triplet of spiking frequencies in some kind of neurological qualia space, this alone would still not be enough for the acquisition of a colour concept. Such concepts are set in practice. They fit into a complex social network and only make sense within that milieu.

3.9. SEMANTIC FIELDS AND FORMS OF LIFE

This milieu is a kind of sense-making ‘stage-setting’ or *semantic field* where things count in determinate ways relative to a community’s practices—as a pedestrian or motorist ‘red’ plays this role in that context; as a sportsman it plays another and so on. These uses of red are embedded in this background or stage-setting, and are completely lacking in the case of the chanters.

A great deal of stage-setting in language is presupposed if the act of naming is to make sense [i.e., if the name is to have a role in a language game and place in a form of life].⁷²

So despite appearances, the children have not yet mastered colour words—in the mechanism of their use, internal accompaniments are idle wheels turning nothing.⁷³ The meaning of a word does not involve catching hold of a referent ‘with a pair of mental tweezers’.⁷⁴

Children are not taught to differentiate, re-identify and speak of colour by simply looking at coloured objects—‘looking teaches us nothing about the concepts of colour’.⁷⁵ Children are trained (or socialised) into practices for using colour to do certain things—one differentiates and re-identifies colours relative to these practices. This indoctrination disposes one to discriminate colours (i.e. divide the spectrum) in particular ways relative to these practices (contra so-called universal

⁷² *Ibid*, p.257. See also *Culture and Value*, p. 23

⁷³ *Philosophical Investigations*, §271

⁷⁴ *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, Volume II, p. 296.

⁷⁵ *Remarks on Colour*, Part I, §72. See also *Zettel*, §332—‘Do not believe that you have the concept of colour within you because you look at a coloured object—however you look. (Any more than you possess the concept of a negative number by having debts).’

neurophysiological constraints on colour classifications). These practices govern the moves one can and cannot make with colour, dictating not only the use of colour words, but also which are similar and which dissimilar, how many kinds there are and so on. For instance, only European and Japanese cultures discriminate seven basic colours terms—red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet.⁷⁶ The Dani of Papua New Guinea, by contrast, divide the spectrum into just two basic colour terms—*mili*-darkish and *mola*-lightish.⁷⁷ The Bassa of Liberia also distinguish just two colours—*ziza*, which is roughly equivalent red/orange/yellow in our culture, and *hui*-green/blue/purple.⁷⁸ While the Shara of Zimbabwe divide colour space into four basic colour categories—*cipsuka*-red/orange, *cicena*-yellow/yellow-green, *citema*-green-blue, and *cipsuka* again to represent the purple end of the spectrum. The Berinmo (again from Papua New Guinea) do not distinguish between blue and green at all, but they do discriminate between *nol* and *wor*—a colour position that does not exist in English.⁷⁹ The Dinka of Southern Sudan and Pukapuka of Samoa are particularly interesting cases. The Dinka use a colour vocabulary based around the colour configurations of their cattle—they can only speak of colour in terms of ‘cattle colours’;⁸⁰ while the Pukapuka classify colour and use colour words that are taro-colours⁸¹—‘red’ is the name of a rose-coloured variety of taro; ‘black’, the name of a taro that has a green/purple inner layer; ‘white’ a taro with a white inner layer.⁸²

Consider the following grammatical cases. In this particular form of life, we are prohibited from describing something as ‘luminous-grey’, or as ‘glowing grey’:

There is the glow of red-hot and of white-hot: but what would brown-hot and grey-hot look like? Why can’t we conceive of these as lower degree of white-hot?⁸³

For the fact that we cannot conceive of something ‘glowing grey’ belongs neither to the physics nor the psychology of colour.⁸⁴

I am told that a substance burns with a grey flame. I don’t know the colours of the flames of all substances; so why shouldn’t that be possible?⁸⁵

⁷⁶ Jocot de Boinod (2005), p. 180.

⁷⁷ *Op. Cit.*

⁷⁸ *Op. Cit.*

⁷⁹ See Roberson (2005).

⁸⁰ Turton (1980), p. 320

⁸¹ McNeill (1972), p. 21.

⁸² *Ibid*, pp. 21-3

⁸³ *Remarks on Colour*, Part I, §34

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, Part I, §40

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, Part I, §41

—These are propositions about the concepts ‘white’ and ‘grey’.⁸⁶

One judges ‘reddish-yellow’ as similar to ‘orange’, but not ‘reddish-green’ to ‘black’—practices govern the concept ‘sameness of colour’ here. These rules are all part of the concepts ‘grey’, ‘red’, ‘yellow’, ‘orange’, ‘green’ and ‘purple’ respectively. Such judgements of similarity are constituted in practice; there needn’t be recourse to anything psychological or physiological here (‘there is nothing for similarity to consist in apart from the community’s readiness to regard the items as similar’.⁸⁷ These classifications then are normative all the way down—we understand and describe certain phenomena (like colour) in terms of socially learned systems of classification. These systems of classification enable one to consistently re-identify phenomena and make meaningful reference to them.⁸⁸

And the similarities between things we notice, and mark with such predicates as ‘green’ are themselves the product of such a practice and are not prior to it.⁸⁹

Colours are individuated by *practices*. Colours are distinguished by chromatic practices in much the same way numbers are by arithmetic ones—‘kinds of number [or colour] can only be distinguished by arithmetical [or chromatical] rules relating to them.’⁹⁰ Experience is not the principle criterion for teaching ‘orange is a mixture of red and yellow’.⁹¹ Rather, we are calculating with these colour terms.

The relation between: (1) mixing paints actually...and (2) saying ‘red and yellow gives orange’—is the same as the relation between: (a) ‘two apples and two apples normally result in four apples,’ and (b) ‘ $2+2=4$ ’.⁹²

In sum, to learn colour words one is socialised into the various practices for using them to do certain things. Again, the meaning of the word lies primordially in the practice of its use, not in the mental association between word and referent.⁹³

3.10. RECAPITULATION OF THE EPISTEMIC ASSUMPTIONS WE ARE ATTACKING

Chapter two examined three examples of mental fix theories of language. Each made

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, Part I, §49

⁸⁷ Maund (1995), p. 214

⁸⁸ More in Section 9.10.—The Private Language Argument

⁸⁹ *Philosophical Investigations*, §219. See also *Remarks on Colour*, Part I, §49, §56.

⁹⁰ *Philosophical remarks*, p. 30

⁹¹ *Remarks on Colour*, Part I, §72

⁹² *Lectures on the Foundations of Mathematics*, pp. 233-234

⁹³ *Philosophical Investigations*, §583

claims about minds reaching out to things. This mental connection between linguistic and non-linguistic entity was of fundamental importance. For Plato, subjects connected with referents via transcendental entities; Locke and Churchland fixed upon referents via representational content. In each case, the word-world connection is forged by certain *inner events*—words reach out to bits of the world via certain inner events that grab hold of, or represent, the bits of the world language is attaching to. This representational mode of referring has come to typify certain basic assumptions of contemporary cognitive science—cognition and cognitive abilities involve two things: representational structures and computational procedures that operate on those structures.⁹⁴ And while the exact nature of these representational and computational procedures remains contentious, there is no mistaking the ongoing privilege these forms of explanation give to minds and things mental.⁹⁵ Language use also tends to be (mis)interpreted in terms of mental acts of association—an utterance or mark *X* is mentally associated with an item *Y* in the world, in virtue of *Y* being represented in the mind of the language user. The mental token of *Y* bridges the reference between the word *X* and referent *Y*—the inner event mediates the relation between *X* and *Y*. When we speak *about* the world, we are speaking about it via certain representations we have of it. Language use operates on a representational foundation; it depends on certain non-public occurrences running parallel to speech/writing.

It must be a serious and deep-seated disease of language (one might also say 'of thought') which makes me say: 'Of course this ↗ is what's really seen'...—The old difficulty, that it seems to us that meaning something was a special state or activity of mind.⁹⁶

3.11. THE PRIVATE LANGUAGE ARGUMENT

Even if there is a link between macro-level names and the micro-firing of neurons (as contemporary versions of the MFR demand), these correlations do not set any relevant limit on the use of language because they are below the normative domain language is used within. The in-the-head approach leaves itself open to the conceptual possibility of skimming the body and behaviour off the mind, which (as we will in this section) are crucial to judging the correctness of ones use of language. Wittgenstein's *private language argument* (PLA) concerns the possibility of privately

⁹⁴ Pylyshyn (1984), p. 131

⁹⁵ See for example Bechtel et. al. (2001), Eliasmith and Anderson (2003), Sobel (2001).

⁹⁶ *Notes for Lectures on 'Private Experience' and 'Sense Data'*, §309

naming sensations. Among other things, the argument primarily examines whether or not mental content/states/sensations can be self-referentially attached to certain expressions. I will use the PLA to further undermine the MFR (even though it seems initially to make certain concessions to it)—the diary-keeper (below) is apparently symbolising/labelling certain internal phenomena.

I want to keep a diary about the recurrence of a certain sensation. To this end I associate it with the sign S and write this sign in a calendar for every day on which I have this sensation...this is done by the *concentrating my attention*; for in this way I impress upon myself the connexion between the sign and the sensation.⁹⁷

Suppose I didn't have any natural expression for the sensation [other than writing the sign S on a calendar], but only had the sensation...And now I simply associate names with sensations and use these names as descriptions.⁹⁸

Wittgenstein deliberately chose internal sensate phenomena as the target of the diarists language to show that even the most intimate of linguistic references (pain sensations in this case) cannot be set privately (i.e. self-referentially)—public practice is still the horizon words mean or refer within.

The diary-keeper case is set up to caricature the MFR—an internal occurrence (a pain sensation in this case)⁹⁹ is symbolised (or labelled) into a public medium by the sign S in a diary. The reference is forged by concentrating my attention on the pain as I record it in a diary. This mental act of concentration is comparable to the mental act of fixing upon the referents of words. And it is again the priority of this private aspect (i.e. the mental act) that I hope to deflate. The diary-keepers association between the sensation and S is a purely private one that's happening entirely in the head.¹⁰⁰ There is no bodily expression of the sensation other than the writing of an S on a calendar. And this is the principle problem with the MFR—the priority of the mental aspect of the MFR means that the body can be conceptually skimmed off as peripheral to the real semantic work happening in the head. In this section I will show this to be a crucial oversight, and one that leads to insurmountable problems for the MFR.

Wittgenstein is claiming that the connection between sign and sensation

⁹⁷ *Philosophical Investigations*, §258 (emphasis added)

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, § 256

⁹⁹ An occurrence that is supposed to be analogous to other kinds of intentional content.

¹⁰⁰ *Philosophical Investigations*, §293—'it is only from [the diary keepers] own case that he knows what the [sign S] means.'

cannot be established *consistently* on a purely private basis—the mental cannot be skimmed off the activity of the body. The question then is whether any legitimate symbolising is happening here at all. Remember the association between representational content and language is central to the MFR’s picture of how language works.

3.12. CRITERIA OF SAMENESS OVER TIME

How is one to decide whether they have used S correctly? How am I to know the sensation I am having now is the same as the one I had earlier? What is the difference between re-identifying and recording the sensation consistently with my own private definition, and it merely *seeming* to me that I am recording the sensation consistently with my own private definition? The claim is that there is no distinction here at all—my impression that I am recording it consistently cannot confirm whether I have re-identified it consistently or not. There has to be recourse to something independent of that impression that I am.

[F]or in this way I impress upon myself the connexion between the sign and the sensation.—But ‘I impress it upon myself’ can only mean: this process brings it about that I remember the connexion right in the future. But in the present case I have no criterion of correctness. One would like to say: whatever is going to seem right to me is right. And that only means that here we can’t talk about ‘right’.¹⁰¹

Impressions alone will not do—‘the balance in which impressions are weighed is not the impression of a balance.’¹⁰² The balance in which impressions are weighed is *behavioural/normative balance*.

THE ARGUMENT FROM NORMATIVITY

1. Language use is interwoven with behaviour.¹⁰³

2. Words can only make sense or mean within certain patterns of activity.

Therefore, 3. Learning a first language involves mastering the patterns of behaviour words mean within (i.e. the patterns of activity they are used within).

4. The mastery of premise (3.) involves following certain rules or norms

¹⁰¹ Ibid, §258

¹⁰² Ibid, §259

¹⁰³ See Section 3.7.—The Normative Dimension of Language

that govern the patterns of activity they are used within.

5. Premise (4.) requires the possibility of distinguishing actually following a rule from it merely *seeming* to one that they are following a rule.

6. The checks on premise (5.)—i.e. ones understanding of the rule, necessitate an appeal to something other than ones *impression* they are following the rule.

7. Behaviour is the only candidate to fulfil that criterial role—it lies open to view, and is checkable by others, and is thus independent of ones mere *impression* of correctness.

Therefore, 8. Our use of language is intimately bound up with our bodies, since we act with our bodies to do certain things with words (i.e. undertake the various activities words are woven into).

Therefore, 10. Questions of semantics cannot be adequately answered by the MFR paradigm, where the mental part of language is separable from the bodily/activity part.

One cannot correctly re-identify a sensation as the same as before, if the only criteria for judging so depends on ones impression that they are. The distinction between 'correct' and 'seems correct' disappears here, undermining any concept of correctness. There has to be recourse to something independent of ones impression of correctness.¹⁰⁴ A behavioural criteria fulfils that role.

It follows that the rules of my private language are only impressions of rules.¹⁰⁵

The normative criteria or social practices that govern the uses of language involve behavioural cues over and above whatever private impressions one has of correctness. If one couldn't appeal to something independent, then one could not be said to be using language correctly or incorrectly. Nor could one judge the correctness of another's use, without this recourse to something independent.

The norms, standards and rules that define correct use in a specific context must in principle be the ones that its user can appeal to in justifying his usage, or in explaining how the expression is to be used correctly by others. If they

¹⁰⁴ *Philosophical Investigations*, §265—'let us imagine a table (something like a dictionary) that exists only in our imagination. A dictionary can be used to justify the translation of a word X by a word Y. But are we also to call it a justification if such a table is to be looked up only in the imagination?...*justification consists in appealing to something independent*...If the mental image of the time-table could not itself be tested for correctness, how could it confirm the correctness of the first memory? (As if someone were to buy several copies of the morning paper to assure himself that what it said was true' (emphasis added)

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, § 259

were not, how could he himself ever use language correctly, or challenge the incorrect use of language on the part of another?¹⁰⁶

Understanding a word requires that there be a difference between *s/he understands this word* and *s/he thinks that s/he understands this word*. There has to be public criteria available to differentiate the ‘same as before’ from ‘seems the same as before’ for instance. The criteria of correctness (or *sameness* in this case) are necessarily public, and open to view; not hidden and private—they are steeped in behaviour and activity.

What is the lesson here? *People use language, not minds*. People do things with words (not their brains). And the correctness of their utterances are judged by what they (as embodied agents) have done, and are going to do given the circumstances, procedures to be followed and personnel involved.

3.13. RULE-FOLLOWING AND THE IMPORTANCE OF INFELICITIES

Uses of language, like those of labelling, naming, referring or associating are all public performances in the sense that the correctness of each is judged by how one goes on with the label, name, referral, or association—i.e. what one does with it. And these activities are *normative* or *conventional* undertakings—executed by certain *people*, in certain *circumstances*, following certain *procedures*. The correctness of an act of labelling, for example, is judged by what the activity of labelling leads to. I cannot be said to have pulled off the act of labelling, say, if the label does not lead me to distinguish the jars in certain ways—by their contents, or date and so on. Which is to say, the act of labelling a jar counts as such if (and only if) certain behaviours follow from it. That is, the act is only pulled off if it leads to or disposes one toward certain other behaviours, like sorting the jars by their label, or picking out a jar because of its label etc. If I could not read the label, or the ink vanished after I wrote it, then this would not count as a successful or ‘happy’ act of labelling. The idea is that, for the act of labelling to be pulled off, one has to know what counts as *not successfully pulling off the action*, in order to know when it is pulled off. That is, understanding what counts as correctly following a certain procedure or rule involves knowing what counts as incorrectly following a rule. *The very notion of getting the*

¹⁰⁶ Allen and Turvey (2001) p. 8

*association right depends crucially on knowing what counts as getting it wrong.*¹⁰⁷

That is, the criteria for correctly following a rule involve knowing what counts as a violation of it.

Being certain of something makes sense only against a background of possible doubt ... getting something right makes sense only against a background of getting something wrong.¹⁰⁸

To follow a rule is to *know what counts as a violation of a rule*—to know when a violation has occurred, i.e. being able to identify or detect a violation when it happens. The diary keeper is not following any rules, since s/he has no sense of what would count as going against his/her rule. For her/him there is no difference between being right and it *seeming* to be right. Following a rule cannot be a private matter, because there is no contrast between following and violating—when this distinction disappears, then so too any notion of correctness disappears.

‘Obeying a rule’ is a practice. And to think one is obeying a rule is not to obey a rule. Hence it is not possible to obey a rule ‘privately’: otherwise thinking one was obeying a rule would be the same thing as obeying it.¹⁰⁹

Ultimately, Wittgenstein is questioning the traditional view that language use is, basically, a relation between a self-contained subject with mental content (the inner) and an independent object (the outer).¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Malcolm (1954), p. 18

¹⁰⁸ Bestor (1998), p. 134

¹⁰⁹ *Philosophical Investigations*, §202

¹¹⁰ Dreyfus (1991), p. 5

CHAPTER FOUR

GRAMMAR AND THE DOUBLING OF MEANING

There is a kind of general disease of thinking which always looks for (and finds) what would be called a mental state from which all our [intentional] acts spring, as from a reservoir¹

To this point I have been questioning the traditional idea that the meaning of a sentence can be decomposed into the mental grasp one has of the things the sentence is about. My claim has been that meaning is not a concept that primarily involves minds and representations, but is far more socially sensitive than we have traditionally been led to believe. This chapter addresses what motivates this tradition and its neglect of the more ambient aspects of meaning. Wittgenstein thought that philosophers are so persistently tempted to conceive language use as something essentially tied to minds and the private things that go on in them, because the grammar of our language inclines them to think that way.² That is, certain philosophical problems (like those of meaning and mind) arise from certain misunderstandings of grammar. For instance, the grammatical necessity of splitting subject and predicate tends to be conflated with an epistemological necessity of separating subject from object. Here, Wittgenstein thinks, we have the source of many philosophical problems—‘we are up against trouble caused by our way of expression’.³ Consider, for example, the grammar of the expression ‘I—I completely forgot to do *it*’, ‘I’m not sure about *that*’, ‘I’d love too meet *him*’—in each of these expressions, something is being predicated of a subject or ego (i.e. forgetfulness to do something, uncertainty about something, eagerness to meet someone). Immediately one is forced to think of the subjective/intentional mind ‘inside’ and the objective world ‘outside’.⁴ This chapter will show the subject-object distinction (which informs the MFR) to be a correlate of the grammatical distinction between subject and predicate.

¹ *Blue and Brown Books*, p. 143.

² *Blue and Brown Books*, p. 48; see also Kenny, 1996, p. 264.

³ Kenny, 1996, p. 264.

⁴ Chapter five will deploy Heidegger’s philosophy to challenge this ‘inside’/‘outside’ dichotomy.

4.1. THE CATEGORY MISTAKE

—THE CONFLATION OF SUBJECT-PREDICATE GRAMMAR WITH SUBJECT-OBJECT INTENTIONALITY

One makes a category mistake when they ascribe the features of one category to another. When someone attributes the normative features of language (i.e. the public aspect—the expression itself) to something sub-normative in-the-head (pace the MFR)⁵ that person has made a *category mistake*.⁶ Wittgenstein’s private language argument proved this an erroneous conflation;⁷ yet philosophers continue to do it. Why? I believe a grammatical conflation between subject-predicate grammar and subject-object intentionality motivates the normative-subnormative category mistake. Indeed, many of the basic assumptions of the MFR—like the idea that minds make language work—may be premised on this conflation, (i.e. built into the grammar of our language). It is my contention that the dominion of the MFR is due largely to the grammatical grip this picture has on our thinking. Such category mistakes can be very misleading, inclining one to look ‘deeper’, underneath the more ‘superficial’ aspects of language use—as though the meaning of a word were something hidden or separate from the public expressions/actions. Philosophers tend to think that in addition to the phenomena described (i.e. the circumstances, personnel, words uttered, gestures, actions and so on), that there is the *meaning itself*—as though there was some further inner occurrence to be explained.

You say: the point isn’t the word, but its meaning, and you think of the meaning as a thing of the same kind as the word, though also different from the word. Here the word, there the meaning. The money, and the cow that you can buy with it. (But contrast: money, and its use).⁸

For example,

I say ‘Come here’ and point towards A. B, who was standing by him, takes a step toward me. I say “No; A is to come”. Will that be taken as communication about a mental state? ... Must still more have taken place, in order for the language-game to take place?⁹

What directs my utterance to A rather than B? All I do is motion with my hand in the general direction of two people (leaving it in doubt which I mean) and say ‘Come here’. What gives my ambiguous utterance a definite meaning? What went on to make it the case that I meant A? Maybe I have a thought of A as I spoke. Meaning

⁵ I.e. subjects relate to objects by way of mental /intentional content.

⁶ Gilbert Ryle, 1973, p. 17

⁷ See chapter three, section 3.11—*The Private Language Argument*. See also the *Beetle in the Box* argument, of section 3.6.

⁸ Kenny, 1996, p. 283.

⁹ *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, Volume I, §21, §22

here is 'imagined as a kind of mental pointing'.¹⁰ Mental representations have typically been thought to direct this mental act of pointing—representations direct my *intention* toward A, making my utterance about him. So, according to the MFR, when I say 'I meant A to come', some kind of representation intervenes between my utterance and person A—'If I say "I meant him" very likely a picture comes to my mind'.¹¹ But how can this mental act of representation alone point to X rather than Y?

Sometimes what distinguishes these two [meaning A rather than B for instance] is nothing that happens while we speak, but a variety of actions and experiences of different kinds before and after.¹²

Consider another of Wittgenstein's examples—a host expecting a guest:

When I expect someone,—what happens? I perhaps look at my calendar and see his name against today's date and the note '5 p.m'. I say to someone else 'I can't see you today, because I'm expecting [Smith]'. I make preparations to receive a guest. I *wonder* 'Does [Smith] smoke?', I *remember* having seen him smoke and put out cigarettes. Towards 5 p.m I say to myself 'Now he'll come soon' ... This and many other more or less similar trains of events are called 'expecting [Smith] to come.'¹³

Here we are tempted to take the concrete facts of the situation and convert them into something mental—*here* the behaviour and utterance (i.e. *telling* someone I can't see them, *wondering* if Smith smokes and *remembering* that he does so I put some out), *there* the mental act of speaking, wondering and remembering. Or again, *here* the situation I expect Smith in, *there* the content/meaning of my expectation—"[a]nd 'meaning it' is something in the sphere of the mind"¹⁴—a sphere one feels the need to penetrate to get beyond the superficial aspects of language.

Here it is difficult as it were to keep our heads up...and not go astray and imagine that we have to describe extreme subtleties.¹⁵

The grammar of the expression 'I' in the above expressions of expectation—I say to someone, I wonder, I remember, inclines one to explain the concept of expectation in terms of subjective intentional states. That is, the grammar of these expressions inclines one to think of the expectation as an intentional property because it is (grammatically) predicated of a subject.

Wittgenstein advises that instead of examining the meaning of these

¹⁰ *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, Volume I §21, §22, §12, see also §7, and *Philosophical*

¹¹ *Philosophical Investigations*, §663.

¹² *Op. Cit.*

¹³ Wittgenstein, 1974, p. 149. See also *Investigations* §444

¹⁴ *Philosophical Investigations*, §358

¹⁵ Kenny, 1996, p.280

utterances in terms of the mental directedness of them (pace the MFR), try looking to the variety of actions and experiences that happen before and after the expressions. Wittgenstein calls these surroundings the ‘stage-setting’ of an utterance—‘the surroundings give it its importance’¹⁶. For example,

while walking with a companion you point toward a flower and exclaim “Look!” Let us say that you meant the flowers color [sic], and not its shape or size or species. What did the difference consist in?¹⁷

On the surface an utterance is vague and ambiguous; I merely say ‘Look!’ yet I mean something definite—look at the *colour*.¹⁸ Under the influence of a grammatical analogy, one may claim an act of mind makes my vague exclamation mean something definite—‘we feel as if we had to penetrate [the vagueness of the] phenomena’.¹⁹

Our understanding of what looks like a vague sentence actually conceals a process of thinking that transforms vagueness into exactness. This process is a kind of computation. It employs a calculus that provides clear-cut truth conditions for an ordinary sentence. Vagueness is only superficial.²⁰

Note how easy it is to slip into a mentalistic/representational interpretation of the scene—it is this ‘this picture with its ramifications [that] stands in the way of our seeing the use of a word as it is’.²¹ Wittgenstein thinks we can avoid this grammatical/philosophical confusion by simply surveying the surroundings of the utterance is embedded within.

Imagine the various surroundings for the act of pointing. Suppose that you and your companion belong to a group that is studying colour in nature. The leader of the group has just given a lecture on ‘pure’ colors, and now the group is on a walk through the woods for the purpose of observing examples of pure natural colors ... you point to a flower and say ‘Look!’.²²

FOUR BASIC FEATURES OF THE CATEGORY MISTAKES MOTIVATED BY SUBJECT-PREDICATE/SUBJECT-OBJECT CONFLATIONS

- One category of phenomenon is explained in terms of another—philosophers might, for example, attempt to explain the normative category of language use in terms of a subnormative category of private representations in the head.

¹⁶ *Philosophical Investigations* §583—‘a smiling mouth *smiles* only in a human face’. See also §686—‘all this points to a wider context’.

¹⁷ Malcolm, 1986, p.104

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p.104

¹⁹ Kenny, 1996, p. 279

²⁰ Malcolm, 1986, 105

²¹ *Philosophical Investigations*, §305

²² Malcolm, 1986, p. 15

These subnormative explanations are supposed to make the meaning of the public part of language definite—(note how the concept of meaning is doubled here—there is the normative part and the subnormative part).

- They unify a range of disparate phenomena to an underlying *principle* or *principles*—phenomena are grouped together or judged as similar on the basis of this principle they *essentially* have in common. The MFR is one such principle—the theories of chapter two all attempted to unify the various uses of language to certain underlying principles or structures—neurological ones, or ones involving representational ideas.
- This principle usually constitutes a ground that underlies the origin, nature and behaviour of the object/utterance, and other related phenomena. Philosophers like Paul and Patricia Churchland, for example, typify this tendency in their attempts to generalise a neurological principle—state-space vector transformations, to a whole range of cognitive activities—sensorimotor co-ordination and discrimination, language use etc.²³

When a category mistake is made, one does not tend to let the *situations* words are used within speak for themselves. The mistake tends to impose a certain (mentalist) interpretation on the situation, reducing its various components to extra-linguistic things (in-the-head) outside the situation itself.

4.2. GRAMMATICAL CHIMERAS

The grammar of words like ‘mean/meant’, ‘know’, ‘think’, ‘remember’, ‘expect’, ‘wish’, ‘imagine’ all suggests certain ways of thinking about minds and things mental. The grammatical form of these expressions inclines one to philosophise mental analogues of the expressions into existence—analogues that fix upon the things we ‘meant’, ‘know’, ‘remember’, ‘expect’, ‘wish for’, ‘imagine’ and in general, talk about. That is, the grammatical form of the above expressions inclines one to think that the meaning and intent of those expressions depends on something mental in the subject we are predicating these acts of remembering, wishing etc. of. They are supposed to make it the case that my utterance was about X rather than Y, for example. Again, one is inclined to think that the surface vagueness expressions is made definite (i.e. is made to mean something definite) by certain inner events that

²³ See Paul Churchland, 1993, pp. 305, 306; Patricia Churchland, 1986, pp. 456-457.

accompany or antedate the expression. Consider the following expressions, while paying careful attention to their grammar. Consider the way it prejudices your thinking toward conceiving the utterance a product of a mental act or expression of representational content.

- '*I wish you all the best*'—the act wishing is being predicated of a subject, as though it is something separate from the activity of wishing—'*I wish I were home*', '*I wish you well*', '*I wish you wouldn't do that*', '*I wish I had one*', '*I have no wish to know*'.
- '*I mean it!*'—the *meaning it* is supposed to be something mental—'*I mean no harm*', '*Don't worry about him, he didn't mean it*', '*I meant food, not McDonalds!*'

Note how the public part (i.e. the *utterance* and *behaviour*) is framed as separate or independent from the private part (i.e. the *intending*, *meaning*, *wishing*) of the speech act. Note how the grammar of the expressions doubles phenomena into a subjective part and a public part, therefore prescribing a certain way of 'construing concepts of mind and mental powers.'²⁴

If someone has said 'Napoleon was crowned in 1804', and we asked him 'Did you mean the man who won the battle of Austerlitz?' he might say 'Yes, I meant him'. And the use of the past tense 'meant' might make it appear as though the idea of Napoleon having won the battle of Austerlitz must have been present in the man's mind when he said that Napoleon was crowned in 1804.²⁵

Here one catches a glimpse of our struggle with language—the use of 'meant' makes it seem that something in the head antedated (or at least accompanied) the utterance to make it the case one meant something specific—that Napoleon was crowned in 1804. This is a particularly striking example of the subtlety of our struggle with language; the tense of the word 'meant' promotes a certain manner of thinking—one that is biased toward thinking of meaning as something in-the-head. Indeed, this may well be the source of a long tradition in the philosophy of mind, which conceives meaning and intentionality as something that happens in the head. We think, for instance, that the meaning of an expression somehow reaches below the surface.²⁶

²⁴ Ryle (1973), p. 16

²⁵ *Blue and Brown Books*, p. 39

²⁶ *Notes for Lectures on 'Private Experience' and 'Sense Data'* §304.

4.3. HOW DOES ONE RESIST THESE GRAMMATICAL SIRENS?

We can prevent the split getting started, by first looking to the circumstances the words are used within and the activities that they lead to. After doing that, ask yourself what more needs to be explained? What more could be added to make the meaning of the expression clear? Indeed, what more could a subnormative-type of explanation provide here that a normative survey could not?

What is there left to explain, what is there left for an explanation to do?...since there are no questions left over.^{27,28}

- *'I mean it!'*—here we have an act of warning/threatening someone. The grammar of the expression again inclines one to predicate the *meaning-it* to a subjective/intentional act of mind. To resist thinking the utterance in subject-object terms, simply survey the circumstances, activities and people involved. The circumstance may be a workplace dispute between employer and employee about pay rates. Typically, chests would be inflated, eyes wide and fixed on the accused, increased heart rate, fists clenched etc. *Meaning it* just is those sorts of behaviour in those sorts of circumstances, with those sorts of people present.
- *'I mean no harm'*—the meaning of a misunderstood tourist's plea is not expression of a subjective state s/he is in when expressing it, but is a product of his/her attempt to clam the aggression s/he provoked by the sacrilegious act of taking pictures of the locals in a temple, say.
- *'Don't worry about him, he didn't mean it'*—an apologetic friend tries to disarm the sulky behaviour of the groom at a wedding reception.

Likewise expressions of wishing—the desire or wish is part of, and dependent on, a wider situation where certain people are present, for various purposes. The grammar, however, of the expression predicates the wish of a subject doing the wishing, thus inclining one to think of the act of wishing a mental act—here the wish, there the act of wishing.

- *'I wish you all the best'*—this could be an *act of well-wishing* before a performer goes on stage; or one of jealousy that it was not me going out there. The features of the situation determine the meaning of an utterance as act of

²⁷ Kenny (1996), pp. 270, 271.

²⁸ Questions like what makes it the case that I my wish refers to X rather than Y?

well-wishing rather than malice.

So despite the grammar of these expression—'[t]he examples were not descriptions of an outside letting us guess at an inside.'²⁹ Yet philosophers continue to be captivated by this picture; guessing at the nature of this 'inside'. The benefit of Wittgenstein's approach is that it helps one stop all the guesswork—not by replacing the guesswork of previous philosophers with a better *theory*, but by refocusing the inquiry away from the nature of the relation between subject and referent, to the total situation—the circumstances, personnel and procedures. This is the real discovery of Wittgenstein's philosophy

The real discovery is the one that makes me capable of stopping doing philosophy when I want to.³⁰

It is the pattern of circumstances that give the utterance its specific meaning. Instead of looking inside ourselves, we should be looking out and about around us at the context of use.

How else might one inoculate themselves against these grammatical traps? Wittgenstein suggests that instead of having a mental representation, imagine for a moment you had a drawing on a piece of paper. So that rather than having a representation of X, I have a drawing of X. What work might the picture (i.e. the analogue of the internal representation) be doing?

Imagine a picture representing a boxer in a particular stance; what makes the picture a representation of how one should place one's feet, or how one should hold oneself, or how one should not; or how one should guard, or how a particular fighter did stand in such-and-such a place?³¹

How is the connection made between the drawing and what it represents? How does the picture represent a certain thing and not another? The picture is only functional in its *application*. The picture represents a certain thing only insofar as I *use it to do so*. Having the image alone is not enough, it can only function as a representation by the way I apply it in a certain context. Wittgenstein encourages one to think of the picture/representation as an illustration in a story-book:

From it alone it would mostly be impossible to conclude anything at all; only when one knows the story [i.e. the surroundings] does one know the

²⁹ *Blue and Brown Books*, p.125

³⁰ *Kenny* (1996), p. 276.

³¹ *Philosophical Investigations*, p. 11

significance of the picture.³²

Neither mental acts of representation, nor substitute drawings, alone have the ‘consequences of meaning’³³—‘meaning is not a process which accompanies a word’.³⁴ Meaning is a function of the situation or language-game they are uttered within—X represents Y, (i.e. X refers to Y) because the *expression* of X, refers to Y *as part of a language-game where it has been assigned that role*, and is thus taken that way by others.³⁵

Consider a further case. Rather than replacing the mental act with a drawing, let’s use a hand gesture instead:

Let’s say the wish for this table to be a little higher is the act of holding my hand above the table at the height I wish it to be. Now comes the objection: ‘the hand above the table can’t be the wish: it doesn’t express that the table is to be higher; it is where it is and the table is where it is. And *whatever other* gesture I made it wouldn’t make any difference.’³⁶

The gesture of holding my hand at the desired height for the table is expressed not by the gesture itself, but by the role that gesture plays as part of this particular situation (or language-game) of *wishing for the table to be higher*—‘the surroundings give it its importance’.³⁷ If we treat the gesture in isolation from this context, then it is quite meaningless. It is only as part of a *whole situation* that the gesture has meaning as a wish for the table to be higher. A situation, for example, where I may have purchased the table on sale, ignoring its height because of the price, only to find when I get it home it is too short. Sitting at the table with a friend after discussing its height, I hold my hand at the desired height—in this context the hand above the table is a wish; if the background stage-setting had been different, then so too, the meaning of the gesture.

The task is to rotate the axis of inquiry away from *explaining things* (like expecting) in terms of things in the head toward *describing them relative to the total situation*, or *language-game*, they figure against. The thought is that once that rotation has been made, there will be nothing more to explain or have a theory about.

(All philosophy can do is to destroy idols. And that means, not making new

³² *Ibid*, §663

³³ *Ibid*, p. 218

³⁴ *Op. Cit.*

³⁵ See *Philosophical Investigations*, §686, 689.

³⁶ *Philosophical Grammar*, pp. 148-149

³⁷ *Philosophical Investigations*, §583

ones—in the ‘absence of an idol’.)³⁸

I have been trying in all this to remove the temptation to think that there ‘must be’ what is called a mental process of thinking, hoping, wishing, believing, etc., independent of the process of expressing a thought, a hope, a wish, etc. [amidst a language game].³⁹

The job to be done in philosophy—as often in architecture—is really more a job on oneself. On one’s own viewpoint. On how one sees things. (And what one demands from them.)⁴⁰

As one’s viewpoint begins to shift—i.e. as one’s view of the semantic fulcrum begins to rotate away from (isolated) minds to whole situations, the less one feels compelled to postulate mental surrogates for the referents of words, and the more easily one can acknowledge the embeddedness of language and meaning. One no longer feels inclined to get at something ‘deeper’, antedating the situation (as though the meaning or intent of an utterance somehow existed before it was spoken). The meaning of an utterance is articulated as it is spoken by certain people discoursing in certain circumstances for certain purposes. Ultimately, one sees that the semantic role of the situation cannot be captured by something mental. Indeed, attempts to condense meaningful language use into the mind/brain often compound the very puzzles they were trying to remove. The question of how words mean, gets pushed back a step by privileging intermediary mental states/processes. This premise naturally inclines one to puzzle over the nature of the mental surrogate—how does it stand for something in the world? How do representations mean? etc.

But these ‘expressions’ can’t be mere words, noises, which you make; they get their importance only from what’s behind them (the state you’re in when you use them)!—But how can this state give importance to noises which I produce?⁴¹

What has to be accepted, is the *primordially of the total situation*—‘our mistake is to look for an explanation where we should see what happens as a ‘proto-phenomenon’ ...look at the language-game as the primary thing’;⁴² not representations in the head. In this way, one is no longer bothered by the nature of the mental entities that relate us to the world, because they are not what bound us to it, our practices do. By simply

³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 267.

³⁹ *Blue and Brown Books*, p. 41

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p.263

⁴¹ *Notes for Lectures on ‘Private Experience’ and ‘Sense Data’*, §321

⁴² *Philosophical Investigations*, §656.

describing the circumstances and actions surrounding the utterance, and the people who played a part in that scene, one renders the meaning of otherwise vague utterances, unequivocally clear. But what philosophical help are these examples? At most they seem only to describe certain actions that might go along with the use of these words. These circumstantial descriptions alone seem too superficial to be of any explanatory significance. At this juncture, Wittgenstein's philosophy is most helpful—it helps us drop the (methodological) assumption that our inquiry has to reach below the surface. By completely describing the context expressions are used within—the circumstances surrounding it, the personnel that are present and the procedures to be followed—this should help us 'frame expressions in such a way that certain worries disappear'⁴³(—worries about how referents are discriminated, for instance).

4.4. SUMMARY

This chapter has shown up certain movements of our thinking to be relative to certain aspects of grammar. I have shown certain prejudices (like those of the MFR) to be sedimented into the grammar of our language. And this is why one finds it difficult to shake the intuitiveness of the MFR—it is so deeply embedded in our language. Certain forms of expression lead us down certain paths of thought, as if a philosophical compass had been incorporated into these expressions, constantly imposing itself upon our thinking. We feel as if we have to go beyond language to something extra-linguistic if we are to strike at the true heart of meaning—special mechanisms of mind for example. The claim here is that the tendency to predicate meaning to minds is borne from confusions in language. Certain forms of expression keep suggesting to us there is something more to be revealed underneath the expression. Grammar, therefore, lays down a false philosophy.⁴⁴ That is, philosophers sometimes labour under the weight of grammatical problems.

The peculiarity of philosophical worry and its resolution might seem to be that it is like the anguish of an ascetic, groaning under the weight of a heavy sphere, until someone gives him relief by saying 'let it drop'. One asks oneself: If these propositions worried you, and you could not cope with them, why did you not let them drop earlier, what stopped you? *I think that it was the false system, which he thought he had to adapt himself to*⁴⁵...

⁴³ Kenny, 1996, p. 271

⁴⁴ Alliston, 1908, p. 75. See also *Philosophical Investigations*, §111.

⁴⁵ Kenny, 1996, p. 268

...*Because they are linked with the oldest habits of thought.*⁴⁶

The effect of these confusions is a 'constant struggle and discomfort (almost a constant itch)⁴⁷ to dig below what we publicly see of language. We feel something essential to be eluding us, and so 'feel as if we had to penetrate phenomena'⁴⁸ to strike upon the essential workings of language.

A picture held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably.⁴⁹

The refined claim is that the most dangerous and stubborn philosophical prejudices (relative to meaning and intentionality) are not so much borne of the explicit theories of the likes of Plato, Locke and Churchland; but are the implicit result of the *natural* apprehension and interpretation of things that is built into the grammar of our language. That is, the picture of the inner event that guides peoples thought is grammatically borne—'these misinterpretations [of meaning and intentionality] are...the ones that are the least noticeable and hardest to repulse'⁵⁰ because they are part of the very language we are using to interrogate the phenomena in question.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 272, emphasis added.

⁴⁷ *Op. Cit.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p. 279.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p. 282

⁵⁰ Heidegger (1982), p. 59, emphasis added

CHAPTER FIVE

FROM MINDS TO PRACTICES

WIDER PHILOSOPHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THIS AMBIENT PICTURE OF MEANING FOR INTENTIONALITY

The new picture of language worked out in chapter three was the first step toward modifying the traditional concept of meaning relative to minds and the MFR. Now I want to examine the corollary picture of intentionality emerging from it. That is, I plan to extend what I've claimed about meaning to intentionality. Drawing on Heidegger's philosophy in *Being and Time*, and Hubert Dreyfus' elaboration of it, I will fuse Wittgenstein's philosophy of language with Heidegger's philosophy of mind. This will deliver, what I believe to be, a richer picture of our intentional relation to the world. The claim is that we relate to or (encounter) the world in much the same way that we speak about it. In each case a background of practices and normative activities are the ground¹ these intentional acts figure within. Chapter three, recall, examined the role of context relative to linguistic phenomena; this chapter will continue that examination relative to our intentional relation to the world. Traditionally our relation to the world has been thought to consist in some kind of a relation holding between a self-contained mind and world—pace Locke's *New Way of Ideas*. Here minds/brains make sense of what the senses deliver. Dreyfus continues,

in order for us to perceive, act, [speak about] and, in general, relate to objects, there must be some content in our minds—some internal representation...that enables us to direct our minds toward each object...this mental content gives intelligibility to everything people encounter...the basic relation of mind to the world is a relation of a subject to an object by way of mental meanings.²

As we saw, the traditional split between mind and world inclines one to examine meaning apart from the contexts words are used within—minds and their representations were given priority here. On this model agents relate to the world by building up an internal map of it. Things in the world are meaningless in and of themselves, and only become meaningful after the mind represents them and synthesises them into meaningful relationships. Heidegger developed his ideas of

¹ I am using 'ground' here in the gestalt sense, where interlocking practices, skills, and equipment provide the basis or *ground* against which things *figure* or show up.

² Dreyfus (1991), p. 2-3, 5

context in response to this cognitivist model of mind. In particular, he rejected the idea that the mind is directed toward objects in the world via some special representation in it that mirrors that object. One consequence of this rejection was that meaning is not projected into the world by meaning-giving minds. He claimed instead that the world is already meaningful. That is, the world has already been made meaningful for us by a historical background of practices, customs and activities. The things we relate to (in the world) are not meaningless entities prior to the minds synthesis of them into meaningful relationships; but are already meaningful according to the ways they have been previously (i.e. historically) integrated in a background of practices. The background endows entities and referents with a meaning which they do not have taken individually, but which they have only as part of a whole situation.

5.1. *AIM*

Examine the role of situation and activity relative to intentional relation to the world in an attempt to move beyond the traditional subject/object model of intentionality (where mental content bridges the relation between agent and world). Thus re-orientating inquiry away from *representational intentionality* toward *situated intentionality*, completing my overall project to move beyond the subject/object paradigm.

5.2. *SITUATED INTENTIONALITY*

The emerging picture of mind and intentionality here is that the world is not made sense of by mental content, but has already been meaningfully organised by the historical practices, skills and activities of a particular form of life. There are two central aspects of this new picture of our relation to the world:

- The role of the *situation*—the circumstances, procedures, and personnel that make up the background *milieu*³ intentional acts figure within.
- The role of that *human purposes, interests and concerns* play in ordering the situation we direct ourselves toward.

Taken together, the milieu that has been purposively (and historically) organised around human concerns provides the background against which we direct ourselves

³ I am defining milieu here as the *environment of activity*.

toward the world—i.e. behave intentionally within, and use language to speak about it. That is, we *direct ourselves toward objects* (encountering them as such-and-such an object) and *speak about those objects*, because they are parts of a certain milieu of activity. Here the encounter with something is determined by the total situation it is embedded within. Likewise for linguistic meaning—the meaning of an utterance is the product of the situation it is used within.

5.3 THE PARALLEL BETWEEN LANGUAGE AND INTENTIONALITY

- Linguistic Thesis

Words have meaning within a specific milieu or situation, i.e. as part of specific language-game or task of the language user—words are meaningful because they are embedded in these schemes of activity. Meaning is absorbed in social practice and practical activity, and therefore outside any supposed *immanence in the mind* (representationally or neurologically speaking).

- The Corollary Intentional Thesis—situated intentionality

Heidegger's parallel picture of intentionality is likewise absorbed in social intercourse, practical tasks and human interests/purposes. Intentional directedness, like language use, is not to be understood as a product of the activity of a self-contained ego—we do not have to perform a mental act in order to enter into commerce with the world. Our relationship with it is established in terms of our self-concerned⁴ dealing with it. That is, our relationship with the world is ordered around human concerns and practical purposes. The world we deal with is pre-structured in accord with the historical concerns and purposes that have (and continue to) preoccupy the particular form of life we are part of. The meaningful presence of a thing (like the meaningful use of language) is a product of these concerns. Concerns that are always self-concerns.

[Things in the world show up as relevant to (or useful toward) the way] Dasein has dealt with and is dealing with the question or issue of its own existence ... [where] what things are (their being) is accessible only insofar as they become intelligible to us as relevant to our projects and involvements.⁵

⁴ In *Being and Time*, Heidegger argues human bear a unique relation to themselves—'these beings, in their being, comport themselves toward their being' §67. That is, humans are self-concerned, they take issue with their being, i.e. they are concerned with themselves and the way they are going to lead their lives.

⁵ Heidegger (1967), p. 177

5.4. THE ROLE OF BACKGROUND PRACTICES: THE FIGURE/GROUND ANALYSIS OF INTENTIONALITY AND THE COLLAPSE OF THE SUBJECT/OBJECT DISTINCTION

Chapter four examined the grammatical force of the temptation to puzzle about the nature of the relation between subject and object. One was (grammatically) led to ask of the nature of the *bridge* that connects the two—how are words about things in the world? How do I speak about it? These ways of construing our relation to the world, however, overlook the special way we inhabit the world. We inhabit in a world ordered by a network of historical practices and customary behaviours. These practices weave a background or environment for agents to intentionally act (and meaningfully speak) within. Dreyfus terms this background a *milieu*. This milieu is ordered according to the historical concerns of the form of life one is a member of. And this milieu is the background intention and language are directed within. That is, the milieu is a dynamic set of relations such as 'useful to', 'suitable as', 'needed for', which are all referred to a human task and a human possibility.

In *Basic Problems of Phenomenology* Heidegger argues subject and object are not separate but *co-terminus*⁶—objects show up as part of our self-defining activity—they enable one to carry out that activity. The relation is *reciprocal*—subject and object reciprocally define each other. That is, we dwell in a world that we are (self) concerned with, and these concerns pervade the world around us insofar as they assign things in that world to matter in certain ways relative to these concerns. Thus the way we encounter the world is a reflection of how members of a particular form of life have understood themselves. Dreyfus continues,

The human world...is pre-structured in terms of human purposes and concerns in such a way that what...is significant about an object already is a function of, or embodies, that concern...we dwell in the midst of an already constituted world.⁷

Objects are not separate from us, but are encountered as reflections of us and our concerns—subject and object are not separate, but co-dependent or co-terminus. There is a certain harmony between organism and environment here, whereby we encounter objects in the world as instrumental toward pulling off certain (self-defining) activities.

⁶ Heidegger (1982), pp. 63-64—'the usual conception of intentionality...misconstrues the structure of the self-directedness-toward, the intention. This misinterpretation lies in an *erroneous subjectivising* of intentionality. An ego or subject is supposed, to whose so-called sphere intentional experiences are then supposed to belong...The idea of a subject which has intentional experiences merely inside its own sphere and is...encapsulated within itself is an absurdity which misconstrues the basic ontological structure of being that we ourselves have.'

⁷ Dreyfus (1979), p.261

Dasein encounters all this equipment, only because it assigns itself to it from some ability-to-be ... Dasein assigns an in-order-to in terms of its ability-to-be ... Dasein is tied to the world, because [the range of possible] abilities-to-be are defined by the entire web of interrelated paraphernalia, tasks, and abilities. This web itself is set up and maintained...by the collective activity of an entire community of Dasein.⁸

Objects needn't be thought of first as over there, out there, apart from me. They are intimately bound up with our concerns in the world. Which is to say, by coming into the orbit of the historical concerns of a particular form of life (i.e. the tasks and preoccupations a particular form of life has underway) objects have already been endowed with meaning.

Meaning is fundamentally social and cannot be reduced to the meaning-giving activity of individual subjects...we do not relate to things primarily through having representations of them⁹

Our intentional relation to the things happens against certain grounds, i.e. the things we relate to figure or show up against certain grounds. Crucially, the ground isolates the figure, not the mind. Heidegger was one of the first philosophers to put these gestalt principles to work in the philosophy of mind. Strictly speaking, however, Heidegger does not use figure/ground terminology in *Being and Time*. But he does employ gestaltic principles in terms of 'equipment' and 'equipmental wholes'—'to the being of any equipment there always belongs an equipmental whole, in which it can be this equipment that it is'.¹⁰ Pollio et. al sum up these figure/ground gestalt principles:

All objects of experience are experienced only in relation to the total situation serving to situate the focal object...All figural aspects of perceptual experience emerge against some ground that serves to delineate its specific experiential form.¹¹

Compare the insights of chapter three—all utterances are understood only in relation to the total situation serving to situate them; i.e. the 'stage-setting' that situates the utterance. Implicitly, then, J. L. Austin and Wittgenstein were also putting the figure/ground structure to work (beyond its original use in relation to perceptual events).

Indeed, this concept of a figure on a ground can be generalised to include the

⁸ Blattner (1992), p. 60

⁹ Winograd and Flores (1986), p. 33

¹⁰ Heidegger (1967), §97

¹¹ Pollio et.al. (1997), p. 13

total relational matrix within which intentional human acts are conducted. For example, there is a growing interest in the above gestalt principles in the fields of computer science and artificial intelligence research,¹² aesthetics,¹³ linguistics.¹⁴ The claim is that we relate to objects that figure against wider grounds. Take Marcel Duchamp's sculptures for instance—*Fountain* and *In Advance of a Broken Arm*. These sculptures are made from prefabricated materials—a urinal and a snow shovel respectively. Duchamp put them into a gallery to demonstrate the role situation plays in determining what makes something count as an art-object (rather than a mundane utilitarian artefact). The idea is that the web of practices the object is embedded in make up a ground against which objects can figure as being such-and-such and object. By taking a urinal out of a restroom (the milieu of amenities) and placing it in a gallery (the milieu of the art-world) the utilitarian object is *transfigured* into an art-object. Nothing has changed in the object itself, only the circumstance it is embedded within. Yet there has been a fundamental shift in the way we encounter the object—the attitudes it calls for, the actions and responses it solicits have fundamentally changed. In a gallery the object calls for an aesthetic response, in a bathroom we encounter it as an amenity. In each circumstance there are different conventions governing my response—in one circumstance the participatory practice is one of aesthetic appreciation and quiet contemplation, in the other, discrete defecation—the attitudes and responses objects call for or solicit from us figure against the 'specific situational ground'¹⁵ the object is part of. The very sight of a urinal in a gallery space gives one a glimpse of the taken-for-granted relationships this bit of equipment normally bears to other equipment, as part of an 'equipmental whole'.¹⁶

Equipment—in accord with its equipmentality—always is in terms of it belonging to other equipment: inkstand, pen, ink, paper, blotting pad, table, lamp, furniture, windows, doors, room.¹⁷

Duchamp's example serves to make these implicit or taken-for-granted (gestaltic) relations, explicit—normally they remain in the background. The gestalt or 'equipmental whole' this piece of equipment normally fits into, discloses that object to

¹² See Winograd and Flores (1986) and Dreyfus (1979), (1996), (1998).

¹³ See Arthur Danto (1993), Marcel Duchamp (2000), George Dickie (1974) and Morris Weitz (1956)

¹⁴ See Wettstein (1988).

¹⁵ Pollio et.al., 1997, p. 15

¹⁶ I.e. urinal, cistern, basin, mirror, soap, hand-dryer, public toilet—these and many other similar things make up the equipmental whole or ground the urinal is embedded within.

¹⁷ Heidegger (1967), §97

be this kind of equipment that it is.

Arthur Danto discusses a similar example in his article 'Tribal Art and Artefact'. He invents an anthropology of two African tribes that live in distant regions of a vaguely bounded area:

Tribe A and Tribe B, to be respectively know as the Pot People and the Basket Folk are each known for their pots or their baskets ... the pots and baskets of one look exactly like the pots and baskets of the other. [Yet] there are differences, even deep differences, but they are not of a kind that meets the eye. It is these I mean now to describe ... the baskets of the Basket Folk—though not the baskets of the Pot People—and the pots of Pot People—though not the pots of the Basket Folk—have a spiritual identity altogether lacking in the indiscernible objects from the other tribe ... It is important to the understanding of this problem that [the] objects [are so] outwardly similar...that it is impossible...to make the distinction on the basis of looks.¹⁸

The pots of the Pot People are used as sacred objects of worship, while their baskets are purely utilitarian objects. This 'cultural allocation' is reversed with the Basket Folk. The question then, is how do objects so outwardly similar come to be encountered so differently? The example shows how certain phenomena are disclosed within a pre-existing cultural milieu—the meaning of an object (as either sacred object or utilitarian) is bound by the background practices they feature within. Each object—pot and basket—is embedded in a different milieu, which in turn endows each with a different figural presence. For the Basket Folk pots are mundane objects for carrying water, storing grain, removing waste, collecting food, fermenting berries etc. Baskets, by contrast, are exalted in temples, enshrined by rare flowers and gems, fruits, scented with incense, chanted to, mythologized etc.—each artefact or piece of equipment figures against these respective equipmental wholes. And on the basis of this embedding, the object/equipment solicits the appropriate response. That is, ones intentional relation or reference to either pot or basket (in either speech or experience) has little to do with what is going on in the head, and more to do with the background of practices they are embedded within. In each tribe, a background of practices has already determined what is appropriate with each object. Members of Tribe A are born into a form of life where pots already count as *this* kind of object, and baskets *that* kind (and vice versa for members of Tribe B). The idea here is that the background practices that characterise a form of life have *already set things to matter in determinate ways*; they provide the gestaltic conditions necessary for

¹⁸ Danto (1993), p. 15-16.

people to discriminate figural objects as counting in certain ways. Which is simply to say, we are socialised to respond to certain things in certain ways. We see something as something useful toward achieving a certain purpose on the basis of our prior socialisation into the practices that have already interpreted that object to mean what it does. Crucially, things in the world have already been meaningfully interpreted for us. We do not need to invoke meaning-giving representations, or special mental syntheses to account for this act of interpretation, because things have already been meaningfully interpreted (as evidenced by their place in an equipmental whole)—meaning always derives from an interpretation that is rooted in a situation, not in the mind.¹⁹ The practice of using pots for utilitarian purposes disposes the Basket Folk to interpret pots in *this* way; and the ritualised behaviour and appreciative practice that governs their engagement with baskets likewise disposes them toward interpreting them *that* way. We encounter things not because of some representational act of mind, but because of the objects prior embeddedness in this background of customary activities and behaviours. Objects have already been endowed with meaning as parts of these activities and situations; individual agents do not bestow significance upon them. One's intentional relation to objects is therefore not directed by representations, but by the practices and activities those intentional acts are part of. Heidegger's claim is that there is no need to invoke meaning-giving representations to bridge an intentional/interpretative meaningful relation to this already world

In interpreting, we do not, so to speak, throw a 'signification' over some naked thing which is occurrent, we do not stick a value on it; but when something within-the-world shows up as such, the thing in question already has an involvement...and this involvement is one which gets laid out by interpretation ... [human purposes] relate entities to other entities, and that is how we encounter them—in their webs of relations with other entities.²⁰

5.5. WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE BACKGROUND OF PRACTICES IS ABSENT?

To understand the full extent of the role background practices play, consider a case of an archaeologist discovering an artefact amongst some ancient ruins, in Tula, Mexico, say, (the ancient capital of the Toltec's). The form of life the artefacts were part of no longer exists—they no longer belong to any 'equipmental whole'. Such artefacts or equipment must fit into a wider context of self-defining activity if they are

¹⁹ Winograd and Flores, (1986), p. 111.

²⁰ Heidegger (1967), §90-191

to be interpreted to matter in certain ways. This ‘fitting’ is a holistic idea—equipment and artefacts can only make sense (i.e. be meaningfully present in certain ways) in the context of other equipment. The Toltec’s would have assigned the objects certain roles that would have occupied wider places within a network of equipment. Without this network some of the artefacts would be quite unintelligible—‘[e]quipment...always is in terms of it belonging to other equipment.’²¹ Tools and cultural artefacts always refer to other tools and artefacts. And it is in terms of these references and involvements that an object is meaningfully encountered. The Toltec’s concerned themselves with this object (as the kind of thing it is) in its assignment or reference to other related bits of equipment. Thus an artefact means what it does for us, because of its reference to other related artefacts, which fit it into a wider equipmental whole.

An entity is meaningful for us when it has been assigned or referred to something, and referred as that entity which it is.²²

An archaeologist can only begin to interpret the meaning/significance of a particular artefact if they know how it refers to other related bits of equipment. If no such involvement is forthcoming, then the object will remain unintelligible—‘a stone, a figure, a sign, a word that reach us isolated from its context is only that stone, figure, sign or word’.²³ The ancient artefacts of the Tales are no longer embedded in a contexture of practices.

Entities show up as what they are (i.e. in their being such and such) only against the background of the interpretive practices of a particular historical culture.²⁴

Again, the mind’s relation to the world is not first forged by representations—agents do not first process information from the environment, and then synthesise various perspectives into a coherent scene.

Interpretation is never a ‘presuppositionless apprehending’ of some given.²⁵ ... The [historical] public way things have been interpreted has already been decisive even for the possibilities of the world ‘mattering’ in certain ways.²⁶

The world is already meaningfully there, we don’t have to make sense of it; it has

²¹ Heidegger (1967), §97

²² *Ibid*, §115

²³ Calvino (1983), p. 89

²⁴ Guigon (1993), p.13

²⁵ Heidegger (1963), §191, §186

²⁶ *Ibid*, §213

already been made sense of.

5.6. SUMMARY

This chapter has completed my analysis of the role social practices and activities play relative to questions of meaning and intentionality. I have shown the historical practices of a form of life to have already set things to matter in determinate ways relative to the roles they have traditionally been assigned to—‘things already count in determinate ways in relation to a community’s practices’²⁷ These practices govern the ways agents behave toward and speak about things in the world. I have shown objects to call out for certain responses from us in virtue of the milieu of activity they are part of. The ground frames the figure here, not the mind. Likewise, with language use—features of the situation determine the meaning of an utterance, not the mind. This background of practices constitutes a shared situation where intentional acts of speech and action are carried out. That is, the prior organisation of the situation we are born into determines not only the meaning of an utterance, but also the significance an object has for us as part of that particular circumstance. The objects we relate to and speak about are already interrelated and meaningful as part of the historical concerns of the form of life one is socialised into.

²⁷ Guigon, (1993), p. 8.

CONCLUSION

This project set out to undermine the long-held view that language has its meaning and foundation in something separate from it, in the mind. I have considered three ways language has been thought to depend on something extra-linguistic—Plato thought it to be founded on the metaphysical organisation of the Forms, Locke, representational Ideas, and for Churchland, state-space transformations furnished the (neurological) basis language works upon. In each case, language was thought to depend on something separate or underneath its expression—something in another world or in the head, accompanying the use of language. Corollary to this picture were a number of epistemological assumptions concerning the nature of the relation between subject and object. Usually, the assumptions were couched in terms of representational intentionality, whereby subjects direct themselves toward the world via the representations they have of it. Intentional agency was thought to depend first on the subject fixing upon isolated bits of information from the world, and then secondarily processing or synthesising those meaningless bits into a meaningful representation of that world. Once a coherent enough model (or representation) had been built up, the subject could then cognise the world, i.e. intentionally direct itself toward it—speak about it and get around in it. Intentional acts (like speaking *about* the world) were thus thought to involve a process of manipulating representations—words name referent objects via the mental content that grabs hold of those referents. Words have meaning through their association with the mental content, which makes it the case that my utterance was about that particular bit of the world and not another.

I have termed this representational component of language the *mental fix requirement*. This picture frames the representing subject as something that exists independently of the objects it represents, (such that mental/representational content bridges the connection between the two). But if one conceives the subject as separate from the objective world ‘out-there’, then one is also inclined to examine intentionality and other associated cognitive phenomena (like language use) without reference to that world, i.e. the milieu or situation language is used within. I have discussed the semantic role of this *situation* in terms of the *circumstances, personnel*

and *procedures* which constitute that situation. I have shown the core problem with the MFR to be its removal of semantic content from the very situation that content is proportionate to, locating it instead in the mind. My arguments have shown language use to be embedded in a dynamic background of practices, where context, people and procedures play the principle semantic roles, rather than minds and their so called *sense-making representations*. My analysis of colour words, in particular, has shown meaning to be a function of the background situation they are used within. This background endows words with meaning, not minds. That is, agents speak about things in the world because certain objects have *already been made sense of as part of an already meaningful situation* (rather than a meaningless one we first have to make sense of).

The claim is that referent things *already* bear meaningful relationships to other things in the world. Which is to say, objects have already been webbed into meaningful relationships—minds (and their synthetic activity) do not do the primary footwork here. That is, the world has already been made sense of prior to whatever synthetic activity minds and their, so-called, meaning bestowing representations might contribute to it. We direct ourselves toward a world that has already been made sense of relative to the practices of that particular form of life. Agents speak about a world that has already been articulated by a background framework of norms, rules and customary patterns of behaviour. Intentional acts (like acts of speech, or the use of artefacts) *figure* against this (back)ground. The meaning or significance, therefore, of a figural part (i.e. intentional act) is determined by the whole it is embedded within. This holistic approach rejects the traditional distinction between agent and world, subject and object. Favouring instead a *gestaltic unity* between the two—figure and ground jointly set limits on one another; they mutually or *reciprocally* define one another, rather than one (the subject) defining the other (the object). Again, minds do not web objects into relationships, they have already been webbed together. Intentional acts can be thought of as moves in a game—intentional moves figure against a certain (back)ground or ‘game’—they are made in the context of other moves, either in response to a previous move, or as calling for another one. Mental entities *alone* cannot have the consequence of meaning because they are isolated from any such contexture. Intentional behaviour (like the activities of the *Pot People* and *Basket Folk*) cannot be explained outside this background of norms, conventions and customs they figure within. Agents speak and

act purposively in virtue of, and as part of, a wider situation. Language and intentionality are fundamentally social phenomena; irreducible to acts of supposed, meaning-bestowing minds. Minds do not make intentional moves, *people do*.

'Nothing is more wrong-headed than calling meaning a mental activity!'¹

¹ *Philosophical Investigations* §693.

Bibliography

Richard E. ALLEN (1960): "Participation and Predication in Plato's Middle Dialogues", *Philosophical Review*, vol. 59, pp. 147-164/

Richard E. ALLEN and Malcolm TURVEY (2001): *Wittgenstein, Theory and the Arts*; ed. Richard Allen and Malcolm Turvey, Routledge: London.

Norman ALLISTON (1908): *The Reflections of Lichtenberg*; London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co

John L. AUSTIN (1963): "Performative-Constatative" reprinted in *The Philosophy of Language* ed. John R. Searle, (1971); Oxford University Press.

John L. AUSTIN (1962), *How to Do Things with Words*, Harvard University Press: Oxford University Press, Lectures 1-4, pp.1-52.

G. P. BAKER & Paul M. S HACKER (1980), *An Analytical Commentary on the Philosophical Investigations*, Oxford: Blackwell

William BECHTEL, Pete MANDIK, Jennifer MUNDALE, and Robert S. STUFFLEBEAM (eds.) (2001): *Philosophy and the Neurosciences: A Reader*, Blackwell: Malden.

Brent BERLIN and Paul KAY (1969): *Basic Color Terms: Their Universality and Evolution*; University of California Press.

Thomas W. BESTOR (1978): "Common Properties and Eponymy in Plato", *Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 27, pp.189-207.

Thomas W. BESTOR (1980): "Plato's Parmenides and Plato's Semantics", *Phronesis*, vol. 25, pp.38-75.

Thomas W. BESTOR (1981): "Plato's One/Many Problem and the Question 'What is a Referential Theory of Meaning?'" , *Philosophical Investigations*, vol. 4, pp. 1-31.

Thomas W. BESTOR (1988): "Plato's Phaedo and Plato's Essentialism". *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 66, no. 1, pp. 26-51.

Thomas W. BESTOR (1998): *Study Guide and Readings in the Wittgensteinian Tradition*, Massey University.

Thomas W. BESTOR (2003): *A Companion to Plato's Dialogues*; Massey University Press.

Simon BLACKBURN (1984): *Spreading the Word: Groundings in the Philosophy of Language*; Clarendon Press: Oxford.

William BLATTNER (1992): *Heidegger: a Critical Reader*, eds. Hubert Dreyfus & Harrison Hall, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA, Blackwell

Robert M. BOYTON & Conrad X. OLSON (1987): “Locating Basic Colour in the OSA Space”, *Color Res. App.*, 12(2), pp.94-105.

William BRENNER (1982): “Wittgenstein’s Color-Grammar”, *The Southern journal of Philosophy*, vol. 20, pp. 289-298.

Italo CALVINO (1983): *Mr Palomar*; Vintage

Harold F. CHERNISS (1936): “The Philosophical Economy of the Theory of Ideas”, *American Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 57, pp. 445-456.

Patricia Smith CHURCHLAND (1980): “Language, Thought, and Information Processing”, *Noûs*, vol. 14, no. 32, pp. 147-170.

Patricia Smith CHURCHLAND (1986): *Neurophilosophy : Toward a Unified Science of the Mind-Brain*; Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press

Patricia Smith CHURCHLAND (2002): *Brain-Wise: Studies in Neurophilosophy*; Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press).

Paul CHURCHLAND (1986): “Some Reductive Strategies in Cognitive Neurobiology”, *Mind*, vol. 95, no. 379, pp. 279-309.

Paul CHURCHLAND (1993): “State-Space Semantics and Meaning Holism”, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. 53, no. 3, pp. 667-672.

Paul CHURCHLAND (1998): “Conceptual Similarity Across Sensory and Neural Diversity: the Fodor/Lepore Challenge Answered”, *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 95, no. 1, pp. 5-32.

Paul CHURCHLAND (2006): “Into the Brain: where Philosophy should go from here”, *Topoi*, vol. 25, no. 1-2, pp. 29-32.

Paul CHURCHLAND (2007): *Neurophilosophy at Work*, Cambridge University Press.

John W. COOK (1972): “Solipsism and Language”, in *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Philosophy and Language*, ed. Alice Ambrose and Morris Lazerowitz, pp. 37-72, Humanities Press: New York

Arthur DANTO (1993): ‘Tribal Art and Artefact’, *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 51: pp. 13–22.

George DICKIE (1974): *Art and Aesthetic: an Institutional Analysis*; Cornell University Press.

Hubert L. DREYFUS (1979): *What Computers Can’t Do: The Limits of Artificial*

Intelligence, (revised edition), Harper Colophon.

Hubert L. DREYFUS (1991): *Being-in-the-world: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and time, Division I*; Cambridge: MIT Press

Hubert L. DREYFUS (1996): “The Current Relevance of Merleau-Ponty’s Phenomenology of Embodiment”, *The Electronic Journal of Analytic Philosophy*, vol.

Hubert L. DREYFUS (1998): “Intelligence Without Representation—Merleau-Ponty’s Critique of Mental Representation: The Relevance of Phenomenology to Scientific Explanation”, *Phenomenology and Cognitive Science*, vol. 1, no. 4, pp. 367-383.

Marcel DUCHAMP (2000): *Affectionately Marcel: The selected correspondence of Marcel Duchamp* ; eds. Francis M. Naumann and Hector Obalk, trans. Jill Taylor; Amsterdam: Ludion Press.

Robert J. FOGELIN (1976): *Wittgenstein*; ed. Ted Honderich, Routledge and Kegan Paul: London.

Charles B. GUIGON (1993): *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*; Cambridge University Press.

Paul M.S. HACKER (2001): “Wittgenstein and The Autonomy of Humanistic Understanding”, in Allen & Turvey (eds.), *Wittgenstein, Theory & the Arts*, pp.39-75.

C.L. HARDIN (1988) *Color for Philosophers: Unweaving the Rainbow*; Hackett.

Martin HEIDEGGER (1967): *Being and Time*, Oxford, Blackwell.

Martin HEIDEGGER (1982): *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press

Gordon HUNNINGS (1988): *The World and Language in Wittgenstein’s Philosophy*; MacMillan: London.

Adam JOCOT DE BOINOD (2005) *The Meaning of Tingo and other Extraordinary words from around the World*; Penguin Books, p.180

Paul KAY and C.K. MCDANIEL (1978): “The Linguistic Significance of the Meanings of Basic Color Terms”, *Language*, vol. 54, pp. 610-646.

Anthony KENNY (1996): *The Wittgenstein Reader*; ed. Anthony Kenny, Blackwell Publishers: Oxford.

John LOCKE (1975): *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*; ed. Peter H. Nidditch, Oxford University Press.

Charles J. LUMSDEN (1985): "Color Categorization: a Possible Concordance between Genes and Culture", *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, vol. 82, pp. 5805-5808.

Charles J. LUMSDEN & Edward O. WILSON (1981), *Genes, Mind, and Culture: The Coevolutionary Process*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press; p. 45.

Norman MALCOLM (1986): *Nothing is Hidden: Wittgenstein's Criticism of his Early Thought*; Basil Blackwell: Oxford.

N. B. MCNEILL (1972) "Colour and Colour Terminology", *Journal of Linguistics*, vol. 8, pp.21-2.

Stephen MILLS (1993): 'Wittgenstein and Connectionism: A Significant Complementarity?' in *Philosophy and Cognitive Science*; eds. C. Hookway and D. Peterson, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ray MONK (1990): *Ludwig Wittgenstein: the Duty of Genius*, The Free Press, New York.

Barry MAUND (1995): *Colours: Their Nature and Representation*; University of Western Australia.

George PITCHER (1966): *Wittgenstein: the Philosophical Investigations (a Collection of Critical Essays)*; ed. George Pitcher, Anchor Books: New York.

PLATO (1997): *Complete Works*; ed. J.M. Cooper and D.S. Hutchinson, Indianapolis: Hackett Pub.

Howard R. POLLIO, Tracy B. HENLEY, Craig J. THOMPSON, James BARRELL (1997): *The Phenomenology of Everyday Life*; Cambridge University Press.

Diane PROUDFOOT (2002): "Wittgenstein's Deflationary Account of Reference", *Language and Communication*, vol 22, no.3, pp. 331-351.

Zenon W. PYLYSHYN (1984): *Computation and Cognition: Toward a Foundation for Cognitive Science*, MIT Press: Cambridge.

Debi ROBERSON (2005), "Colour Categories are Culturally Diverse in Cognition as well as in Language", *Cross-Cultural Research*, vol. 39, pp. 56-71

Richard RORTY (1993): "Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and the Reification of Language" in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*; ed. Charles B. Guigon, Cambridge University Press: New York.

Joseph ROUSE (1998): *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, general editor, Edward Craig, London, New York, Routledge.

Bertrand RUSSELL (1940): *An Inquiry into meaning and Truth*; Allen and Unwin:

London, p.29.

Gilbert RYLE (1973): *The Concept of Mind*; Penguin University Books, p.16.

Barbara SAUNDERS and Jaap VAN BRAKEL (1997): “Are There Nontrivial Constraints on Colour Categorization?”, *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, vol. 20, no. 2, pp. 167, 228.

Carolyn P. SOBEL (2001): *The Cognitive Sciences: An Interdisciplinary Approach*, Mayfield: California.

David G. STERN (1991): “Models of Memory: Wittgenstein and Cognitive Science”, *Philosophical Psychology*, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 203-218.

David TURTON, (1980) “There’s no such Beast: Cattle and colour Naming Among the Mursi”, *Man* vol. 15, p. 320.

Jaap VAN BRAKEL (1993): “The Plasticity of Categories: the Case of Color”, *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*, vol. 44, pp. 103-135.

G. H. VON WRIGHT (1993): “Humanism and the Humanities” in *The Tree of Knowledge and other Essays*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, pp. 155-171.

John S. WERNER and Billy R. WOOTEN (1979): “Opponent Chromatic Mechanisms: Relation to Photopigments and Hue naming”, *Journal of the optical Society of America*, vol. 69, pp.422-434.

Howard WETTSTEIN (1988): “Cognitive Significance Without Cognitive Content”, *Mind*, vol. 97, no. 385, pp.1-28.

Morris WEITZ (1956): “The Role of Theory in Aesthetics”; *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 15, no. 1, pp. 27-35.

Meredith WILLIAMS (1999): *Wittgenstein, Mind and Meaning: Toward a Social Conception of Mind*; Routledge: London.

Peter WINCH (1969): *Studies in the Philosophy of Wittgenstein*, ed. Peter Winch; Routledge and Keagan Paul: London.

Terry WINOGRAD and Fernando FLORES (1986): *Understanding Computers and Cognition: a New Foundation for Design*; Alex Publishing Corporation: New Jersey.

Terry WINOGRAD (1985): “Moving the Semantic Fulcrum”, *Linguistics and Philosophy*, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 91-104.

Ludwig WITTGENSTEIN (1968): “Notes for Lectures on ‘Private Experience’ and ‘Sense Data’”, *The Philosophical Review*, vol. 77, no. 3, pp. 275-320

Ludwig WITTGENSTEIN (1969): *On Certainty*; eds.G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright, trans. Denis Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe, Oxford: Blackwell.

Ludwig WITTGENSTEIN (1969b): *Preliminary Studies for the 'Philosophical investigations': Generally Known as the Blue and Brown Books*; Basil Blackwell: Oxford.

Ludwig WITTGENSTEIN (1972): *Philosophical Investigations*; trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, Oxford: Blackwell.

Ludwig WITTGENSTEIN (1974): *Philosophical Grammar*; trans. Anthony Kenny, ed. Rush Rhees, Oxford: Blackwell.

Ludwig WITTGENSTEIN (1975): *Philosophical remarks*; ed. Rush Rhees, trans. Raymond Hargreaves and Roger White, Blackwell: Oxford.

Ludwig WITTGENSTEIN (1976): *Wittgenstein's Lectures on the Foundations of Mathematics*; from the notes of R. G. Bosanquet, Norman Malcolm, Rush Rhees and Yorick Smythies, ed. Cora Diamond; Hassocks: Harvester Press.

Ludwig WITTGENSTEIN (1978): *Remarks on Colour*; ed. G.E.M. Anscombe, trans. Linda L. McAlister and Margarete Schattle, Basil Blackwell: Oxford.

Ludwig WITTGENSTEIN (1980): *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology, Volume I*; eds. G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, Chicago University Press: Chicago.

Ludwig WITTGENSTEIN (1980a): *Culture and Value*; eds. G.H. von Wright and Heikki Nyman, trans. Peter Winch, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Ludwig WITTGENSTEIN (1980b): *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology, Volume II*; eds. G.H. von Wright and H. Nyman, trans. C.G. Luckhardt and M.A.E. Aue, Chicago University Press: Chicago.

Ludwig WITTGENSTEIN (1982): *Zettel*; eds. G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, Blackwell: Oxford.

Richard M. ZANER (1964): *The Problem of Embodiment: Some Contributions to a Phenomenology of the Body*; The Hague.