USE, USAGE AND MEANING

By GILBERT RYLE AND J. N. FINDLAY

I—GILBERT RYLE

In 1932 Mr. (now Sir) Alan H. Gardiner published *The Theory of Speech and Language* (Clarendon Press). A central theme of his book was what, with some acknowledged verbal artificiality, he labelled the distinction between ' Language ' and ' Speech '. I shall draw, develop and apply this distinction in my own way.

A Language, such as the French language, is a stock, fund or deposit of words, constructions, intonations, *cliché* phrases and so on. ' Speech ', on the other hand, or ' discourse ' can be conscripted to denote the activity or rather the clan of activities of saying things, saying them in French, it may be, or English or some other language. A stock of language-pieces is not a lot of activities, but the fairly lasting wherewithal to conduct them; somewhat as a stock of coins is not a momentary transaction or set of momentary transactions of buying, lending, investing, etc., but is the lasting wherewithal to conduct such transactions. Roughly, as Capital stands to Trade, so Language stands to Speech.

A Language is something to be known, and we get to know it by learning it. We learn it partly by being taught it, and partly by picking it up. For any given part of a language, a learner may not yet have learned that part; or he may have learned it and not forgotten it, or he may have learned it and forgotten it, or he may have half-learned it; or he may have half-forgotten it. A Language is a corpus of teachable things. It is not, of course, a static corpus until it is a dead language. Nor would two teachers of it always agree whether something should be taught as a part of that language. Is French literary style to be taught by teachers of the French Language or by teachers of French Literature? Just when does an acceptable turn of phrase become an idiom? How old can a neologism be? What about slang?

Saying something in a language involves but does not reduce

to knowing the requisite pieces of that language. The speaker is here and now employing what he had previously acquired and still possesses. He is now in the act of operating with things of which he has, perhaps for years, been the possessor. The words, constructions, intonations, etc., that he employs in saying what he says in these words, constructions, etc., is not another part of that language. It is a momentary operation *with* parts of that language, just as the buying or lending that I do with part of my capital is not itself a part of that capital, but a momentary operation with a part of it. That, indeed, is what my capital is for, namely, to enable me to make purchases, benefactions, loans, etc., with parts of it whenever I wish to do so. It is a set of moderately permanent possibilities of making particular momentary transactions.

If I say something in French, then, even though what I say has never been said before, I do not thereby enlarge the French language, *i.e.*, increase the amount to be learned by a student of the French language. The fact that he does not know what I said does not entail that there is a bit of the French language that he has still to learn. Dicta made in French are not parts of the French language. They are things done with parts of the French language. You might utilise the same parts in saying something identical with or quite different from what I said. Your act of saying it is not mine, and neither is a part of the fund on which we both draw. But dicta can notoriously fossilise into *clichés*. ' *Je ne sais quoi* ' can now be used as a noun; and ' *Rest and be Thankful* ' can be a proper name.

We are tempted to treat the relation between sentences and words as akin to the relation between faggots and sticks. But this is entirely wrong. Words, constructions, etc., are the atoms of a Language; sentences are the units of Speech. Words, constructions, etc., are what we have to learn in mastering a language; sentences are what we produce when we say things. Words have histories; sentences do not, though their authors do. I must have learned the words that I utter when I say something with them. I need not, and, with reservations, cannot have learned the sentence that I come out with when I say something. It is something that I compose, not something that I have acquired. I am its author, not its employer. Sentences are not things of

which I have a stock or fund.   Nor are my buyings and lendings things of which I have a hoard or purseful.

In daily life we do not often mention as such the sentences that people produce.   We speak instead of their allegations, complaints, promises, verdicts, requests, witticisms, confessions and commands.   It is, in the main, people like grammarians, compositors, translators, amanuenses and editors who need to refer to the things that people say as ' sentences ', since they are *ex officio* concerned with such matters as page-space, punctuation, syntax, plagiarisation, and so on.   None the less, what they are interested in are instances of someone, actual or imagined, alleging, complaining, warning, joking, etc., though their special concern is with the punctuation of them and not with their humourousness; with their length and not with their truth; with their moods and tenses and not with their relevance or rudeness.

When Caesar said ' *Veni; vidi; vici* ', he said three things, though he used only three Latin words.   Then is ' *Vici* ' a word or a sentence?   The queerness of this disjunctive question is revealing.   What Caesar produced, orally or in writing, on a certain day, was a laconic sentence, if a sentence is an instance of someone saying something.   In this instance Caesar said some-thing which was true.   But he said it using only one Latin word, a word which had long been there for anyone to use anywhen in saying all sorts of considerably different things.   The word was not true, or, of course, false either.   Caesar boasted ' *Vici* ', but the dictionary's explanation of the verb ' *Vici* ' need say nothing about Caesar boasting.   What it describes was, perhaps, also used by, *inter alios,* some concussed gladiator asking anxiously ' *Vici?* '   The boast ' *vici* ' was a different sentence from the question ' *vici?* ', though the authors of both used the same Latin word, of which neither was the inventor.   The word ' *vici* ' was there, in their common fund, to be employed, misemployed or left unemployed by anyone anywhen.   The boast ' *vici* ' and the query ' *vici?* ' were two momentary speech-acts in which this one word was utilised for saying different things.   Our question " Is ' *vici* ' a word or a sentence? " was queer because its subject was ambiguous.   Was it about a speech-episode, like a boast or a query, or was it about an inflected Latin verb?   It was queer

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also because ' . . . a word or a sentence?' was a disjunction
between predicates of quite different categories, on a par with
' . . a bat or a stroke?'

Is the interrogative sentence ' *vici?* ' a part of the Latin
language? Well, would a student still have some Latin to learn
who had never met it? Surely not. What he had learned is
enough to enable him to construe it if he should ever meet it.
What he construes are employments of Latin words, constructions,
etc.; what he must know in order to construe or understand
these employments, are the Latin words, inflections, constructions,
etc. He must know the word in order to understand the one-
word boast or question; but that knowing is not this under-
standing; what he had. long since known is not what he has just
understood or misunderstood. As we employ coins to make
loans, but do not employ lendings, so we employ words, etc.,
in order to say things, but we do not employ the sayings of
things—or misemploy them or leave them unemployed either.
Dictions and dicta belong to different categories. So do roads
and journeys; so do gallows and executions.

Sometimes a person tries to say something and fails through
ignorance of the language. Perhaps he stops short because he
does not know or cannot think of the required words or
constructions. Perhaps he does not stop, but produces the wrong
word or construction, thinking it to be the right one, and so
commits a solecism. Perhaps his failure is of lesser magnitude;
he says something unidiomatically or ungrammatically; or he
gets the wrong intonation or he mispronounces. Such failures
show that he has not completely mastered, say, the French
language. In the extended sense of ' rule ' in which a rule is
anything against which faults are adjudged to be at fault,
solecisms, mispronunciations, malapropisms, and unidiomatic
and ungrammatical constructions are breaches of the rules of,
e.g., the French language. For our purposes we do not need
to consider the sources or the status of rules of this kind, or the
authorities whose censures our French instructor dreads.
Solecisms are in general philosophically uninteresting. Nor,
for obvious reasons, do we often commit solecisms, save
when young, ill-schooled, abroad or out of our intellectual
depth.

The reproof ' You cannot say that and speak good French ' is generically different from the reproof ' You cannot say that without absurdity '. The latter is not a comment on the quality of the speaker's French, since it could be true though the speaker had spoken in flawless French, or had not been speaking in French at all, but in English or Greek instead. The comment, if true, would be true of what was said whatever language it was said in, and whether it was said in barbarous or impeccable French or English. A mis-pronunciation or a wrong gender may be a bit of faulty French, but a self-contradiction is not a fault-in-French. Cicero's *non sequiturs* were not lapses from good Latin into bad Latin. His carelessness or incompetence was not linguistic carelessness or incompetence, if we tether the adjective ' linguistic ' to the noun ' Language ' as this is here being contrasted with ' Speech '.

There is an enormous variety of disparate kinds of faults that we can find or claim to find with things that people say. I can complain, justly or else unjustly, that what you said was tactless, irrelevant, repetitious, false, inaccurate, insubordinate, trite, fallacious, ill-timed, blasphemous, malicious, vapid, uninformative, over-informative, prejudiced, pedantic, obscure, prudish, provocative, self-contradictory, tautologous, circular or nonsensical and so on indefinitely. Some of these epithets can be appropriate also to behaviour which is not speech-behaviour; some of them cannot. Not one of them could be asserted or denied of any item in an English or French dictionary or Grammar. I can stigmatize what you said with any one of these epithets without even hinting that what you said was faulty in its French or whatever other language you said it in. I grumble at your dictum but not at your mastery of the language that it was made in. There are countless heterogeneous disciplines and corrections which are meant to train people not to commit these Speech-faults. Not one of them belongs to the relatively homogeneous discipline of teaching, say, the French language. Speech-faults are not to be equated with Language-faults. Nothing need be wrong with the paints, brushes and canvas with which a portrait is bungled. Painting badly is not a pot of bad paint.

Logicians and philosophers are, *ex officio,* much concerned

with kinds of things that people say or might be tempted to say. Only where there can be fallacies can there be valid inferences, namely in arguments; and only where there can be absurdities can there be non-absurdities, namely in dicta. We are presented with *aporiai* not by the telescope or the trawling-net, but by passages in books or by ripostes in debates. A fallacy or an impossible consequence may indeed have to be presented to us in French or English, etc. But it does not follow from this that what is wrong with it is anything faulty in the French or English in which it is presented. It was no part of the business of our French or English instructors to teach us that if most men wear coats and most men wear waistcoats it does not follow that most men wear both. This is a different sort of lesson and one which we cannot begin until we have already learned to use without solecism ' most ', ' and ', ' if ', etc. There are no French implications or non-implications, so though ' p ' may be said in French and ' q ' may be said in French, it is nonsense to say ' q does not follow from p in the best French '. Similarly, what is impossible in ' The Cheshire Cat vanished, leaving only her grin behind her ' is not any piece of intolerably barbarous English. Carroll's wording of the impossible story could not be improved, and the impossibility of his narrated incident survives translation into any language into which it can be translated. Something was amusingly wrong with what he said, but not with what he said it in.

I have a special reason for harking on this point that what someone says may be fallacious or absurd without being in any measure solecistic; *i.e.*, that some Speech-faults, including some of those which matter to logicians and philosophers, are not and do not carry with them any Language-faults. Some philosophers, oblivious of the distinction between Language and Speech, or between having words, etc., to say things with and saying things with them, give to sentences the kind of treatment that they give to words, and, in particular, assimilate their accounts of what a sentence means to their accounts of what a word means. Equating the notion of the meaning of a word with the notion of the use of that word, they go on without apparent qualms to talking as if the meaning of a sentence could equally well be spoken of as the use of that sentence. We

hear, for example, that nonsensical English sentences are sentences that have no use in English; as if sentences could *be* solecisms. Should we expect to hear that a certain argument is henceforth to contain an Undistributed Middle in B.B.C. English?

My last sentence but three, say, is not something with which I once learned how to say things. It *is* my saying something. Nor is an execution something erected to hang people on. It *is* the hanging of somebody. Part of what we learn, in learning the words of a language, is indeed how to employ them. But the act of exercising this acquired competence, *i.e.*, the saying something with them is not in its turn an acquired wherewithal to say things. It neither has nor lacks a use, or, therefore, a use in English.

The famous saying: " Don't ask for the meaning; ask for the use ", might have been and I hope was a piece of advice to philosophers, and not to lexicographers or translators. It advised philosophers, I hope, when wrestling with some *aporia*, to switch their attention from the trouble-giving words in their dormancy as language-pieces or dictionary-items to their utilisations in the actual sayings of things; from their general promises when on the shelf to their particular performances when at work; from their permanent purchasing-power while in the bank to the concrete marketing done yesterday morning with them; in short, from these words *quâ* units of a Language to live sentences in which they are being actively employed.

More than this; the famous saying, in association with the idea of Rules of Use, could and I think should have been intended to advise philosophers, when surveying the kinds of live dicta that are or might be made with these trouble-giving words, to consider especially some of the kinds of non-solecistic Speech-faults against which the producer of such live dicta ought to take precautions, *e.g.*, what sorts of dicta could not be significantly made with them, and why; what patterns of argument pivoting on these live dicta would be fallacious, and why; what kinds of verification-procedures would be impertinent, and why; to what kinds of questions such live dicta would be irrelevant, and why; and so on. To be clear about the ' how ' of the employment of something we need to be clear also about its ' how not to ', and about the reasons for both.

Early in this century Husserl and later Wittgenstein used the illuminating metaphors of ' logical syntax ' and ' logical grammar '. Somewhat as, say, indicative verbs used instead of subjunctive verbs render some would-be Latin sentences bad Latin, so certain category-skids and logical howlers render dicta, said in no matter which tongue, nonsensical or absurd. A so-called Rule of Logical Syntax is what a nonsensical dictum is in breach of. But the analogy must not be pressed very far. The rules of Latin syntax are part of what we must learn if we are to be able to produce or construe Latin dicta. They are parts of the equipment to be employed by someone if he is to say either sensible or silly things in decent Latin. The Rules of Logical Syntax, on the other hand, belong not to a Language or to Languages, but to Speech. A person who says something senseless or illogical betrays not ignorance but silliness, muddle-headedness or, in some of the interesting cases, over-cleverness. We find fault not with his schooling in years gone by but with his thinking here and now. He has not forgotten or mis-remembered any of his lessons; he has operated unwarily or over-ingeniously in his execution of his momemtary task. In retrospect he will reproach not his teachers, but himself; and he will reproach himself not for never having known something but for not having been thinking what he was saying yesterday.

The vogue of using ' Language ' and ' linguistic ' ambivalently both for dictions and for dicta, *i.e.*, both for the words, etc., that we say things in and for what we say in them, helps to blind us to the wholesale inappropriateness of the epithets which fit pieces of language to the sayings of things with those pieces; and to the wholesale and heterogeneous inappropriatenesses of the variegated epithets which fit things said to the language-pieces and language-patterns that they are said in.

It remains true that philosophers and logicians do have to talk about talk or, to put it in a more Victorian way, to discourse about discourse. But it is not true that they are *ex officio* concerned with what language-teachers are *ex officio* concerned with.

II—J. N. FINDLAY.

I AM in great agreement with what I regard as the substantial points in Professor Ryle's paper. His definition of language I think rather arbitrarily narrow: for him it is a ' stock, fund or deposit of words, constructions, *cliché* phrases and so on '. I should have thought it would be wrong not to include in a language the various syntactical and other *rules* which restrict our employment of the capital of expressions mentioned by Professor Ryle, though perhaps I am wrong in thinking he meant to exclude them. That adjectives must agree with the gender of their substantives in certain cases would certainly be held to be part of the French language, as it is not part of the English. There is also, I think, a further arbitrariness in excluding sentences from *language*, and in making them the units of *speech* which are produced when we say things. I think we can and should distinguish between the sentence *Je ne said quoi* as a mere possibility permitted by the French language, and the same sentence as used or produced by someone to say something. I can in fact see no good reason why one should not have a narrower and a wider conception of a language. On the narrower conception, a language includes a vocabulary and rules, whereas on the wider conception it includes also *all* the possible sentences that could be framed out of the vocabulary in accordance with the rules. In this sense French or English would include all the permissible sentences that could be framed in it, whether anyone ever uttered or wrote or thought them or not. If this conception of a language makes it absurdly wide, the conception of it as a vocabulary plus rules makes it unduly narrow. Certainly, however, I think we want to distinguish between a sentence as a gramatically permissible word-combination, and the utterance or writing down or silent thinking of that sentence by someone on some occasion to make an allegation, raise a query, express a doubt, etc., etc., and in the latter case I find a language of *use* or *employment* more natural than Professor Ryle's language of *production*. I think therefore that Professor Ryle is legislating rather vexatiously in forbidding us to speak of sentences as parts of language, or to say that such sentences can be *used* by speakers. I do not, however, think that this vexatious piece of legislation is in the forefront of Professor Ryle's intentions.

What Professor Ryle is mainly concerned to do seems to me to be to distinguish between grammatical faults in the use of words in constructing sentences, and faults in what may be called ' logical syntax ' or ' logical grammar ', which involve the use of words to construct perfectly grammatical sentences, but which none the less violate a deeper set of rules, the rules of sense, the rules of logic, the rules regulating the mutual relations of categories, etc., etc. With all this I am deeply in agreement, because it involves precisely the recognition that different sorts of words, as it were, make different sorts of abstract *cuts* in their subject-matter, or help to execute different sorts of abstract *cuts*—some, as Aristotle might say, tell us *what* things are, others *how* they are, others *how many* they are, others *conjoin*, others *emphasize*, others *bracket*, etc., etc.—and that in making such quite different types of cross-section they become subject to the relations necessarily obtaining among such cross-sections, so that some verbal combinations which are smooth and pretty grammatically none the less make hideous nonsense. Professor Ryle, it seems to me, is here suggesting that it is the relations of different sorts of *meanings* to one another which determine the depth-grammar of words, and that these meanings and their relations are matters that must be *independently* considered if we are to study logical as well as grammatical syntax. If this suggestion is not implicit in his words, perhaps he will explain what sort of abuse of words it is that is logical or depth-grammatical as opposed to merely surface-grammatical abuse. Incidentally, I feel in the contexts invoked by Ryle that it is doubly tempting to talk of the *use* and *abuse* of grammatical sentences. The sentence is there, a fully-fashioned grammatical entity, and it is its use to express a categorially possible combination of meanings which is at times possible and legitimate, whereas at other times there is really only an abuse.

Having expressed my agreement and disagreement with Ryle, I may perhaps allow myself to dwell a little on the famous dictum which he quotes and which has dominated philosophical discussion for the past twenty years: ' Don't ask for the meaning: ask for the use .' I wish to make against it the not often raised objection that the use for which it bids us ask, is of all things the most obscure, the most veiled in philosophical mists, the most remote from detailed determination or application, in the wide

range of philosophical concepts. There is, I think, a use of ' use ' which is humdrum and ordinary, but in which a study of the use of expressions is of only limited philosophical importance and interest. There is also a use of ' use ' characteristic of the later writings of Wittgenstein which is utterly remote from the humdrum and ordinary, and which has won its way into the acceptance of philosophers largely because it has *seemed* to have the clearness and the straightforwardness of the ordinary use. We are all proof against the glozing deceits of words like ' substance ', ' being ', ' nothingness ', ' consciousness ', etc., etc.: we at once see that some occasions of their employment are really only abuses—but we are not yet proof against the fascinations exerted by the singular abuses of so ordinary a term as ' use '. When these abuses are exposed, the whole attitude represented by the slogan quoted by Ryle reveals itself as completely without significant basis, which unfortunately puts an end to all but a limited emphasis on ' use ' and ' usage ' by philosophers. Since the suggestion that use and usage—in some acceptable sense—*are* philosophically very important, certainly underlies Ryle's paper, I need not apologize for irrelevance in proceeding to demolish this suggestion.

The reason why it is absurd to tell us *not* to attend to the meaning of expressions but to concentrate on their use, is perfectly simple: it is that the notion of use, as it ordinarily exists and is used, presupposes the notion of meaning (in its central and para-digmatic sense), and that it cannot therefore be used to elucidate the latter, and much less to replace or to do duty for it. The notion of use is a *wider* notion than the paradigmatic notion of meaning: it covers many *other* things beside the meaning of an expression, but the meaning-function in its paradigmatic sense is certainly *one* of the things it covers, and it is not possible to give a clear account of use without presupposing this function. What I am saying is simply that we cannot fully say, in a great many cases, how an expression is used, without saying what sort of things it is intended to refer to, or to bring to mind, and just how, or in what angle or light, it purports to refer to them, or to bring them to mind. And in cases where it would be wrong and absurd to say that an expression *independently* brought something to mind, or presented it in a certain light, it would none the less be uncontestably right to say that it *helped* to do such things in some definite matter, so that what was brought to mind would be

different, or *differently presented*, if the expression were not part
of our total utterance.   Thus if I make use of the word ' dragon '
in a large number of contexts, I use it to refer to a human being
or beings, generally mature and female, and I use it also to
represent such a human being or beings as being restrictive,
uncompromising and somewhat terrifying.   And if I *apply* the
term in a certain context I see that to which I apply it in the light
connoted by my words.   And if I use the words ' such a ' before
uttering the word ' dragon ', these words certainly help to suggest
that what I am describing is *very* restrictive, *very* uncompromising
and *very* terrifying, *i.e.*, they contribute to the force of my descrip-
tion without playing an independent part of it.   In saying what
the use of my expressions is, I therefore have to say what, in the
ordinary diction of logicians, they denote and connote, what their
precise reference is or what their general scope, or how they
contribute to connotation or denotation, and it is not thought
possible to say how many expressions are *used*, without bringing
in such connotative and denotative particulars

The notion of use of course goes far *beyond* that of connotation
and denotation, and it is one of the extremely important dis-
coveries of modern semantics that there are *some* expressions
whose use, in certain contexts, is *not* to connote or denote anything,
nor even to help to do either, but to do such things as give voice
to feelings and wishes, evoke certain attitudes in others, or *perform*
certain formal social acts, *e.g.*, promises, which have certain
definite social consequences, etc., etc.   That *not* all expressions,
on all occasions of their *use*, perform the functions of reference
or characterization, or assist in such performance, is certainly a
discovery not to be underestimated, which has cleared the deck
of much tangled tackle and many stumbling-blocks.   But this
kind of *non*-referential, *non*-connotative use is parasitic upon a
connotative, referential one, and could hardly exist without it.   It
is one of Wittgenstein's more irresponsible fancies that there could
be a language composed *only* of commands, or *only* of curses,
or *only* of greetings.   The concept of use also certainly covers all
the hidden *implications* and *suggestions* which attach to the writing
or utterance of a word or a sentence, but which are not strictly
part of what it means or says: thus when I say ' He did not commit
this murder ' I may use this sentence to imply that he committed
certain other murders, that I absolutely believe him to be no

murderer, that we live under laws forbidding the taking of life, etc., etc. But all such implications and suggestions are likewise dependent upon the function of directly connoting or denoting something, and are in fact an extension of the same. Use also obviously covers the mere requirements of accidence and syntax, though these, as Ryle has shown, are mere instrumentalities in the task of significant diction.

What is implicit, however, in the slogan ' Don't ask for the meaning: ask for the use ' is not that use covers much *more* than the connotative and denotative functions of language, but that it somehow resumes and completely explains the latter, that we can completely see around and see through talk about the reference and connotation of expressions by taking note of the way people operate with such expressions, how they combine them with other expressions to form sentences, and the varying *circumstances* in which producing such sentences is reckoned appropriate or fully justifiable. This study of verbal manoeuvres, and of appropriate and justifying circumstances, must not, however, be confined to the single instant of utterance: it must point *backwards* to the all-important situations in which use was *learnt* or *taught*, and it must point *forwards* to the innumerable situations in which the utterance in question will again be found *appropriate*, or will be found to be more and more abundantly *justified*. The study of use therefore includes a genealogy and a prognosis of the most indefinite and complex kind, much more extensive than any that occurs in a merely grammatical or philological study. In another respect, however, the slogan gives ' use ' an extraordinarily restricted interpretation. The operations involved in use are not to be operations conducted privately in anyone's head, or at least such operations can only be brought into consideration in so far as they can be narrowly tied up with other non-private operations, and the *circumstances* in which such operations are conducted must all be circumstances belonging to what may be called the common public environment, circumstances in which bricks are being assembled into buildings, apples taken from drawers and handed over to customers, railway-signals altered, or hunting expeditions conducted. The sort of change which is a mere change in perspective or in conscious ' light ' is *not* among the circumstances mentionable in describing use.

And there is yet another most extraordinary restriction placed

upon our account of the *circumstances* in which a word is correctly used: we must not employ the word or its equivalent to explain those circumstances. We must not, *e.g.*, say, that when a man is confronted by three apples in a drawer, or by an apple and another apple and yet another apple, he is then justified in employing the word ' three ' in connexion with such apples. The word ' three ' may be employed in describing the circumstances justifying countless *other* sorts of utterance, but not the circumstances justifying its *own* employment. In the same way we must never say that it is when a man is confronted by a red object, or has learnt to discriminate its colour, that he is justified in calling it ' red '. Such accounts are held to be wholly trivial and unilluminating, and are moreover held to suggest various deep philosophical fallacies: the belief that meanings exist ' out there ' in the things we deal with *before* we find the appropriate words to ' pick them out ', or that they exist ' in the mind ' or the understanding before we find words to express them. Whatever we suggest by our accounts of use, we must never suggest that there are *pre-existent meanings*. Words enjoy meaning and reference in and by our use of them, and our use cannot be explained in terms of any meaning that antedates the use of words. And since understanding and thinking are defined in terms of the operation with signs, we must never speak as if we could understand or think anything before we dispose of appropriate verbal expressions and have been taught to employ them. The programme of this extreme ' utilitarianism '—as one may perhaps call the use-doctrine—is impressive: it resembles nothing so much as the brave empiricist programme of Locke and Hume, in which no idea was to be admitted into the charmed circle of thought and knowledge without producing a genealogy purer than any required by the Nuremberg laws, exhibiting a proper origin in sensation and reflection, and a derivation from these by approved processes. But, like that brave programme, it faces the crucial objection that it cannot be carried out completely, and that no comprehensive account of use and usage can be given which does not contain some members of impure origin. That the brave programme was hopeless Wittgenstein himself perhaps obscurely realized, when he wrongly said of the *Brown Book*, the most profound and wonderful of his writings, that it was *nichts wert*. But if success, rather than stimulus and provocation, is the

criterion of philosophical value, his judgment was entirely justified.

I need not range far nor cite many instances to make plain the totally unilluminating, indeed deeply obfuscating character of attempts to give a complete account of the use of expressions in terms of merely public operations and circumstances. The very conception of a *rule*, central to the ' utilitarianism ' in question, abounds in difficulty. For we are expressly told that to follow a rule is not necessarily to be guided by a spoken or written formula, since each such formula admits of interpretation in terms of another formula, and this in terms of another, and so on indefinitely. Nor is the following of a rule to be identified with any sort of inner personal understanding of that rule which can guide one's subsequent performance, since to hold this would be to accept pre-existent meanings resident in the queer medium of the mind. Nor can the following of a rule be identified with one's actual performance up to a point, since this is always compatible with an infinity of rules. In the end it would seem that following a rule must be an ineffable sort of affair: it must be something that can be accomplished in one's *doing* (in this case, speaking), but not effectively spoken *about*. It is something that one can know how *to do* without being able to know how what one does is done. The conception of a linguistic rule has, in fact, all the irretrievable obscurity of the structural resemblance constitutive of meaning in the *Tractatus*, which cannot be expressed but only *shown*. If it is at least *possible* that a rule should at times be understood or grasped in thought, we can understand what it is like to follow it without thought, but if grasping is a function of following, the whole activity of following dissolves in mystery. I do not myself know how it differs from the most arbitrary irregularity except that it mysteriously *feels* right at every stage, and that others, standing at my side, mysteriously agree in such feelings. And if it is hard to throw light on the following of rules in terms of outward circumstances and performances, how much harder it is to say in what lies conformity to an *open* rule, one which is to be applied over and over *indefinitely*. While the *thought* expressed by the phrase ' and so on indefinitely ' is most absolutely simple and easy to entertain, it is a thought *logically* impossible to evince adequately in one's performance. Much has been written, from the standpoint of the use-doctrine, about the difference between closed and open games, but the discussion ends up with very much what

it started from, that it is a difference in the *spirit* with which the respective games are played. A man, *e.g.*, using an open arithmetic simply has a system or general rule for constructing numerals *indefinitely*. That a spirit is operative in this case I should not care to deny, but that it consorts well with the use-doctrine, or establishes its superiority, I cannot conceive.

Similar difficulties confront us if we consider the use-account of the use of descriptive adjectives like those of colour. We are forbidden to talk of prior colour-differences in objects, or prior colour-discriminations in persons, as this would involve the grave error of positing pre-existent meanings. We are introduced to imaginary tribal activities which involve the picturesque carrying about of charts of colour samples and their comparison with, or imposition on objects, but these it would seem explain little or nothing, since the charts are dispensable and admit moreover of a wrong use. From the use of charts the tribe progresses to the use of colour samples carried somehow in the mind's eye, and ultimately to the mere unhesitant pronouncement, after sufficient training, of certain colour-words in the presence of certain objects. With this pronouncement others as unhesitatingly agree. From the Scylla of holding that ' blue ' stands for a discriminable blueness in objects, or expresses an awareness of blueness in one's mind, one proceeds to the Charybdis of saying that those things are blue which we and others agree, and have been trained, to call so. It is plain, of course, that one must have ultimates somewhere, and it is plain also that there are different possibilities of colour-discrimination corresponding to different possibilities of usage: what is *not* plain is why one should prefer such a strange, secondary ultimate as a *use* to the more obvious, understandable ultimates of discriminating thoughts in the mind, or discriminable features in things.

The most superb example of the problem-increasing character of the use-semantics is, however, to be found in its treatment of cases where men use expressions without obvious reference to any palpable feature of the public environment, when they give voice, *e.g.*, to recollections or anticipations, or describe their personal feelings or impressions, or report their fantasies or their dreams. Here the course is followed of attempting to account for such uses by supposing men to be such as *spontaneously* to want to use expressions taught in certain contexts in contexts where their

normal justification is absent, and that these non-normal needs, so strangely universal among us, constitute the basis for a new *secondary* set of linguistic usages, where the sole fact that we agree in feeling certain linguistic urges is the sole criterion of their correctness.   Thus children perhaps spontaneously run over the names of objects recently presented to them, or can be encouraged to do so without difficulty: meaning can then be given to the *past tense*, and they can learn to say that they *had* a ball, a stick, a rattle, etc.   To ' refer to the past ' is merely to learn to employ the past tense in such circumstances, an account as amusingly free in presupposing pastness and temporal passage in the *circumstances* of the learning, as it is firm in denying any non-verbal *understanding* of them.   Men then spontaneously begin to use the past tense where there is no such recent provocation: we then give a use to talk about ' remembering ', particularly if others agree in such spontaneous inclinations.   The reference to the past in memory is therefore not the ultimate, mysterious thing that Husserl, Broad and others have supposed it to be: it merely reflects the strange tendency of men to talk preteritively beyond the limits of recency, and the further linkage of this fact with the readings of instruments, the reports of others, and many other observed matters.   It may now happen that men waking from sleep spontaneously talk in the past tense *as if* recalling happenings which no one remembers, and which do not fit in with the observable contemporary state, or with the memory-inclinations of others.   The concept of ' dreaming ' now makes its *début* to take care of these extraordinary performances.   Malcolm, the admirable exponent of a preposterous analysis, admits that on it dream-language is very odd: it is *as if* one is faithfully recalling something, but one cannot explain this fact by saying that one *did* experience what one is disposed to report, since this would involve an unintelligible hypothesis, one excluded by the guiding assumptions of the doctrine of use.   What these queernesses surely show is the profound mistakenness somewhere of these guiding assumptions.   To make use of a gnostic principle used by Moore in other contexts: we *know* certain facts about meaning much more absolutely than we can be sure of the premises, or the inferential rules, of semantic arguments designed either to establish them, or to explain them away. Obviously we cannot make straight sense of many linguistic usages without postulating just those pre-existent understandings (not confined to matters in the public forefront) and the possibility of

communicating such understandings to others, which it is the
whole aim of the use-doctrine to exclude.

The use-doctrine may further be objected to for its profoundly
circular, question-begging character. This is a point ably made
by Mr. Gellner in a book where some of the most profound
criticisms of the use-doctrine and its consequences lie hidden
under a somewhat popular exterior. To have seen an unacceptable,
unargued naturalism behind Wittgenstein's brilliant façade of
exposition, is no mean insight. By describing the functioning of
linguistic expressions exclusively in public and social terms, we at
once *go too far* in assuming such approaches to be wholly justified
and clear, and we also *do not go far enough* in refusing to recognise
aspects of language not fitting an approach of this sort, or in
' proving ' them to be misguided or senseless. These two lines of
objection really coincide, since it is by turning away from aspects
of language it cannot readily accommodate that the use-doctrine
is unable to see its own difficulties and obscurities. The use-
theorists have dwelt much on the profound subtlety of ordinary
language, but they have been far from recognizing *how* subtle it
actually is. For it not only uses expressions to point to, or to
throw light on, ordinary objects, but it also uses them *reflexly*, in
the manner studied in Husserl's *Logische Untersuchungen*, to point
to or throw light on its own *meanings*, thereby setting up
an order of objects as clear-edged and partial as its normal objects
are fuzzy and full, and as delicate in their abstraction as they are
indispensable for the higher flights of thought. That a phrase
like ' the third door on the right ' can be used both straight-
forwardly to refer to a door, and reflexly to refer to its own
meaning, is a truth plain to babes, but occasioning headaches to
the semantically over-wise and prudent. Ordinary speech, further,
provides us with an instrument for communicating with others
about matters public and common, which is also an instrument for
purely personal use, in which different observations, different
views, different judgments provide much the same complementary
parallax, and the same corrective or confirmatory testing as in
the interpersonal case. But not only is it thus double in its use,
it also manages to incorporate the personal in the public use, and
the public in the personal, in a regress pursuable as far as even
we choose. Thus we all understand other people's first-person
talk by analogy with our own, and its imperfect public intelligi-
bility is also perfectly and publicly intelligible, since everyone

makes just such first-person statements in his own case. The manner in which we smoothly swing over from another man's perfectly understood use of the first-person pronoun ' I ', and replace it with ' he ' in reporting the content of his statement, and expect the other man to do the same in regard to us, as well as the children's games in which these proprieties are amusingly violated: all these show an understanding of the antithesis of contrasted privacies, and of their overcoming in a wider publicity, of which the use-semantics betrays no inkling. In the same manner, ordinary speech has in it the germs of what may be called the Cartesian or the Lockean inversion, the reversal of the ordinary approach from outward things to the mind, into an approach to outer things from the facts of our subjective life. Though the language in which we talk of and to ourselves—the best subject-matter and audience—may have had its *source* in contexts of public ostensibility, it can, by a profitable ingratitude, use the personal language thus painfully acquired to cast doubt upon, or to throw light on, its own origin. We may illuminate our understanding and knowledge of public matters in terms of just those personal experiences and pre-existent understandings which talk about public matters first renders possible. And this personal Cartesian or Lockean story can then achieve the widest publicity, since to have back rooms continuous with those opening on the public square is the most universal, most inescapable of predicaments. It is no doubt by a creative trans-formation that the rumour of the square penetrates backwards, and is re-echoed in the small back rooms, and it is likewise by a creative transformation that these transformed echoes rejoin the rumour of the square. All this, however, unquestionably happens, and it is the task of a philosophical semantics to make sense of it, and not to declare it unintelligible.

Nothing that has been said in the foregoing is meant to reflect on the painstaking, detailed study of linguistic usage, or the actual manner of its teaching, if used to show how we actually come to mean what we undoubtedly do mean, or to throw light on the complexity and subtlety of our meanings, or to show how we come to be misled into supposing we mean what really conflicts with the ' depth-grammar ' of our meanings. Our criticisms are only of a radical use-theory carried to extremes, which constructs fables as to how we might have been taught the meanings of words in order to buttress *a priori* doctrines as to what we *must* or *cannot*

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mean.   If anyone thinks such doctrines archaic and superseded, and so not requiring rebuttal, he is wide of the truth.   Wittgenstein's accounts of language-games are so arresting, so novel, so subtle in their detailed development, so daring in their frank embrace of the unplausible, so imbued with intellectual seriousness and earnestness, and so great, finally, in their aesthetic appeal, that it is hard to see through them or around them.   They fascinate the philosopher in the same way that Wittgenstein claimed that philosophers were fascinated by the forms of ordinary language, and against such fascination determined steps are necessary. The steps I have taken in this paper may not have been sufficiently subtle, and may have involved certain misunderstandings of detail: I shall hope, at least, to have incited others to do better.

All this should not, of course, be taken as reflecting on the philosophical greatness of Wittgenstein.   Wittgenstein is the author of three wholly differing accounts of meaning, all of which merit entire rejection: meaning is *not* reduplication of structure, it is *not* verification or verifiability, it is plainly *not* what he meant by ' use '.   It is not these things, though it is of course intimately connected with them all, but it will be best illuminated by construing further the old humdrum notions of connotation and denotation, and by seeking painfully to throw light on the ' thought behind our words ', for which, on account of the peculiar categories it involves, it would seem that no adequate surrogate has been, or can be, offered.   It is, I surmise, in the ' intentional nature of thought ' that the true solution of the problems of meaning is to be found.   But by formulating these three inadequate accounts, Wittgenstein has given the semantic problem the central place it deserves in philosophy, and has contributed vastly to its solution.   Through his inability to account satisfactorily for certain linguistic performances, he has indicated the precise nodes where language makes its various creative leaps and has thereby given philosophical semantics its opportunity and its task.   Moreover, each of Wittgenstein's frequent rhetorical questions is such that, if answered in the sense *not* intended by the question, it will lead to an illuminating result: they are practically all arrows which, if read in the reverse direction, point unerringly to some truth.   A philosophy of meaning so valuably wrong does not differ profoundly from one that is systematically right.

ARISTOTELIAN SOCIETY

CORRIGENDA

for Supplementary Volume 35

Page 117, line 4 from the foot.
  For incompatible *please read* compatible

Page 224, lines 4 to 5.
  For The words, constructions, intonations, *please read* His
  employment of the words, constructions, intonations,

Page 228, paragraph 2, line 1.
  For harking *please read* harping