

Philosophy and the Vision of Language

Paul M. Livingston

Routledge Studies in Twentieth-century Philosophy

Philosophy and the Vision of Language

Philosophy and the Vision of Language is a philosophical interpretation of the recourse to language in analytic philosophy over the twentieth century, examining the enduring significance of the linguistic turn that inaugurated the analytic tradition and still determines many of its characteristic methods and problems.

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Preface

This book has several origins, widely separated in time and space. One of the first of these was the ambivalent reaction I had upon my initial encounter with analytic philosophy as an undergraduate in a prominent American philosophy department in the mid-1990s. There, the projects of Quine and Davidson were still current, those of Carnap and Russell much less so, and phenomenology and “continental” philosophy widely dismissed and barely discussed at all. The pedagogy that communicated the current projects to me did a good job of expounding their details, but was less successful at showing their deeper programmatic motivations and larger philosophical significance. It took me longer to see the currently favored projects themselves as arising from, and hence interpretable in terms of, a long and revealing history. This history, I realized later, connects the contemporary projects of analytic philosophy to what was once experienced as nothing short of a revolution in thought: the attempt to grasp in symbolic logic the very structure of the world, and so to make the terms of language speak into existence the clarity of a demystified life. It was then, especially in reading Wittgenstein, that I realized that whatever “analytic philosophy” might today be said to be, its particular methods and styles could be understood as resulting from a radical and unprecedented opening of language to philosophical investigation and reflection. Discerning the effects of this opening in the history of the tradition might help as well, I reasoned, to determine what is really at issue in the question of its continuance into the future.

At the same time, I had taken up reading some of the texts of twentieth-century “continental” philosophy, particularly the phenomenology of Husserl and Heidegger. The accusation of “unclarity” that analytic philosophers often direct against them did not convince me, and as I read further, I began to see the possibility of a much closer conversation than is now customary between analytic philosophy and these and other “continental” texts. The close connections between Husserl’s phenomenology and the projects of Frege and the early Vienna Circle, the significant parallels between the analytic tradition’s mid-century critique of Cartesianism and Heidegger’s critique of subjectivism, and (above all) the common origination of *all* of these projects in developments of Kant’s critique of reason, all

spoke for the possibility of a renewed discussion of the two traditions' common methodological and thematic strands.

I grew convinced, at the same time, that the epochal discovery of language for philosophical criticism at the beginning of the analytic tradition gestured toward an "object" whose occurrence is too pervasive, and implications too general, in ordinary human life for its philosophical relevance to be limited to a specialized consideration of the conceptual problems of scientific knowledge or a mere systematization of pre-existing or commonsensical "intuitions." Continental philosophers, largely unschooled in the methods of analysis, clarification, and criticism deriving from Frege, might see formally based reflection on language as irrelevant to a larger consideration of the problems of meaning and existence; analytic philosophers might continue to dismiss these problems themselves as too vague and intractable. Even within the analytic tradition itself, the question of language, once opened for philosophical reflection, has again and again subsequently been partially or wholly concealed or obscured, dissimulated and repressed. It nevertheless remains possible, in a broader historical context, as I have attempted to show herein, to grasp the analytic tradition's inquiry into language as one of the most complete and radical developments of philosophy's continuing critical encounter with what was long ago grasped as *logos*, and brought down through the ages as reason and *ratio*, the immanent form of thought and the order of the world.

Another origin of this book came later, in my reading, in graduate school, of contemporary texts that seek to theorize and account for the regularities and norms of meaningful language. These texts, more or less universally, presupposed a conception of language as grounded in intersubjective "social practices" controlled by public criteria of application and evaluation. But when I read the definitive documents of the middle of the twentieth century (most of all, those of Quine and Wittgenstein) that were supposed to have actually proven this basis, I was surprised to find that they seemed to drive toward a quite different (indeed almost opposite) conclusion. For far from establishing the possibility of basing an account of linguistic meaning in an account of praxis, they seemed to me to locate an essential gap or aporia between signs and their application in an ordinary human life, demonstrating an essential incommensurability of linguistic meaning with any theoretically describable structure of practice or action. The skeptical or critical results that demonstrate this gap, it seemed to me as well, must have deep consequences for the form of our ordinary access to language's structure, and hence for our understanding of the diverse and varied contexts and situations of human life wherein language is regularly at issue.

If the question of language has indeed been definitive for the analytic tradition, this definitiveness is nevertheless not immediately evident either in the prevalent methods of the tradition as it is currently practiced or in much of the historiography that has recently begun to recount their development. As the methods of analytic philosophy have gained a position of unquestioned

prominence in Anglo-American philosophy departments, the underlying motivations of its original project have often nevertheless been lost, hidden, or obscured within an ostensibly neutral set of practices of expository clarity and rational argumentation. This obscuration arises, as we shall see, for essential reasons from the deep and nearly unresolvable ambiguities to which the philosophical critique of language is exposed as soon as it attempts to gain theoretical clarity about its own positive methodological basis. Nevertheless it amounts to an artificial and premature closure of a set of essential questions that have by no means either been answered or dissolved by positive theory.

In the various specific investigations of this book, I have therefore tried to trace the consequences of the philosophical vision of language for the development of some of the main historical projects of the analytic tradition, asking, in each case, what ensures or precludes the openness of language to philosophical reflection, what constitutes language as an object or ensures the possibility of a critical inquiry into its structure or limits, and also what permits, and what problematizes, our everyday rational reflection about the bearing of language on the form of a human life.

My aim in posing these historical and conceptual questions is not to espouse or invite any positive doctrine or theory. Instead, I hope only that this book can serve as a kind of signpost or marker, a historically based indication of a question that was once open for philosophy and could be taken up again, not only in the future inheritance of its specific methods, but also in the practices and events of an everyday life that knows itself as transfigured by the language it takes up.

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1 Introduction

Language and structure

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 we may call understanding these signs, meaning them, interpreting them, thinking. These latter activities seem to take place in a queer kind of medium, the mind; and the mechanism of the mind, the nature of which, it seems, we don't quite understand, can bring about effects which no material mechanism could . . .

Frege ridiculed the formalist conception of mathematics by saying that the formalists confused the unimportant thing, the sign, with the important, the meaning. Surely, one wishes to say, mathematics does not treat of dashes on a bit of paper. Frege's idea could be expressed thus: the propositions of mathematics, if they were just complexes of dashes, would be dead and utterly uninteresting, whereas they obviously have a kind of life. And the same, of course, could be said of any proposition: Without a sense, or without the thought, a proposition would be an utterly dead and trivial thing. And further it seems clear that no adding of inorganic signs can make the proposition live. And the conclusion which one draws from this is that what must be added to the dead signs in order to make a live proposition is something immaterial, with properties different from all mere signs.

But if we had to name anything which is the life of the sign, we should have to say that it was its *use*.¹

If language grants the possibility of sense to a human life, then the systematic inquiry into its structure consigns this life to an ambiguous basis in the relation of signs to their meanings. For as soon as it becomes the object of systematic analysis, the totality of language both demands and refuses completion by a principle of meaning exterior to its own economy. Wittgenstein's text, written in 1933 or 1934 as part of a series of notes intended for his students at Cambridge, identifies the desire for such a completion in the thought of his great philosophical progenitor, Frege. The anxiety to which this desire responds is one of death, specifically a death of sense in the materiality of the sign. The characteristic resource it marshals against this anxiety is the life of the human being who speaks, understands, intends and thinks.

One of the most significant projects of the analytic tradition in the twentieth century has been its attempt to envision and comprehend the structure

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of language. From the first moments of the development of its characteristic modes of analysis, reflection, and inquiry, the analytic tradition has attempted to grasp language as a regular structure of signs accessible to rational elucidation. Wittgenstein's analysis of the tendencies operative in Frege's thought displays, particularly clearly, some of the constitutive tensions to which this attempt is prone. As we shall see over the next several chapters, the analytic tradition's search for a comprehensive description of the structure of language has also involved a complex consideration of the *life* of the human user of language. It has pictured this life, alternatively, as the self-consciousness of a subject of experience or as the shared life of a community of speakers, the mutuality that is seen as the foundation of any possibility of communication. The implications of the analytic tradition's joint envisioning of language and life are varied and far-ranging; a historically based exploration can help to elucidate the broader legacy of the analytic tradition itself for contemporary critical thought and action. In its diagnostic modality, this exploration looks toward the clarity of a life that no longer seeks its significance in the problematic attempt to master the relationship of signs to their meanings, but might find in the withdrawal of this relationship into abeyance the vanishing of the problem it represents.²

I

Analytic philosophy's engagement with language has been, on any account, longstanding, sustained, and determinative for both the tradition's main methods and its most significant results. It is probably impossible to identify a *single* conception of the nature of language that underlies all of the tradition's varied analytic, reflective, and critical projects. Nevertheless, there is a distinctive set of interrelated theoretical and methodological commitments that have repeatedly made reference to "language" itself *possible* for many, if not most, of the projects of analytic philosophy throughout the twentieth century that have discussed it. Introducing these commitments briefly may serve to facilitate reflection on the nature of this reference and focus some of the questions that it raises.

As I shall discuss it in this work, the *structuralist* picture of language consists in four interrelated central commitments and a fifth, less central one that often (though not always) goes along with the first four:

- 1 Language as a whole can be understood as a *system* or *structure* of signs, words, propositions, sentences or other significant terms.
- 2 The logical, grammatical, or structural interrelations among these terms, as well as their ordinary use in speaking or writing, are wholly or partially constrained by a corpus of intelligible *rules* or *regularities*.
- 3 These rules or regularities are describable and their description can account for the *correct* or *normal* use of terms in everyday interlocution.

- 4 On the basis of such a description, it is possible to determine the *meaning* or *meaningfulness* of terms or combinations of terms used on particular occasions.³
- 5 The rules or regularities that thus constrain the use of language are essentially *public*, *intersubjective*, and *social* in character.^{4, 5}

These interrelated theoretical commitments, naturally linked to one another in the vision of language that they determine, have had far-ranging methodological consequences from an early moment in the development of the tradition. At its beginning, they provided the methodological basis for the projects of conceptual or logical *analysis* that characterized the tradition in its early stages, and indeed originally gave it its name. For the practitioners of these early projects, the solution or dissolution of philosophical problems depends on the clarification and description of logical *structure*.⁶ Analysis of propositions, facts, or concepts into their structurally simpler elements serves to reveal the real or genuine form of these individual items or their systematic interrelationships, over against our ordinary tendencies to mistake or misconstrue these forms or relations. The demonstration is, in particular cases, to be guided by an overarching elucidation of the structure of a set of systematically interrelated terms, whether these terms are conceived as elements of language (at first they were not), as objects of knowledge, or as individual concepts, thoughts, senses or meanings.

An early and influential expression of one such project can be found in the manifesto “The Scientific Conception of the World: The Vienna Circle,” released in 1929 to summarize the project of the circle of philosophers and scientists that had been, since the early 1920s, meeting in Vienna around Moritz Schlick. The manifesto describes the “scientific world-conception” of the Circle as consisting in two main features: first an “empiricist” and “positivist” orientation demanding that “there is knowledge only from experience”; and second, the application of “a certain method, namely *logical analysis*.”⁷ The authors (chiefly Hans Hahn, Otto Neurath and Rudolf Carnap) explain the implications of this method:

It is the *method of logical analysis* that essentially distinguishes recent empiricism and positivism from the earlier version that was more biological-psychological in its orientation. If someone asserts “there is a God”, “the primary basis of the world is the unconscious”, “there is an entelechy which is the leading principle in the living organism”, we do not say to him: “what you say is false”; but we ask him: “what do you mean by these statements?” Then it appears that there is a sharp boundary between two kinds of statements. To one belong statements as they are made by empirical science; their meaning can be determined by logical analysis or, more precisely, through reduction to the simplest statements about the empirically given. The other statements, to which belong those cited above, reveal themselves as empty of meaning if one

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takes them in the way that metaphysicians intend. ... Analysis ... shows that these statements say nothing but merely express a certain mood or spirit.⁸

According to the Vienna Circle authors, then, the analysis of propositions decides the meaningfulness of statements of ordinary and philosophical language by elucidating the extent of their logical connection to propositions already known to be meaningful (in this case, propositions describing the “empirically given.”) This determination provides the basis for drawing a line, within language as a whole, between statements that are meaningful (those of empirical science) and those that lack meaning (typically those of “metaphysics”). As the authors of the manifesto make clear, this demarcation of language into meaningful and meaningless regions itself depends on a systematic elucidation of the logical interrelationships of the concepts of science.⁹ In the spirit of the “scientific world-conception” that they saw as gaining ground in Europe, England, and the U.S.A., the authors of the manifesto thus looked forward to the complete dissolution of metaphysics through the clarification of the logical structure of meaningful language. The project, despite the similarities they noted to earlier versions of empiricism and positivism, had its methodological basis in the new apparatus of logic that the Circle philosophers had available to them, and in the conception of language as a total structure of signs that it suggested.¹⁰

When the manifesto authors wrote in 1929, there were already significant precedents for the practice of logical analysis that they espoused. Perhaps the most decisive early influence was Frege’s conception of a systematic notation for the clear logical expression of thoughts, the so-called *Begriffsschrift* or “concept writing.” The new syntax was to bring out in symbolic form the underlying structure of thought. Frege compared the improvement over ordinary thinking that such a notation would afford to the advantage of a microscope over the eye. Like a specialized visual instrument most useful for special investigative purposes, the more precise symbolism would, without replacing ordinary language, facilitate the special work of an analysis of the logical structure of concepts actually underlying ordinary claims and judgments.¹¹ The analysis would be particularly important, Frege thought, in consolidating the rigor of mathematical proof and placing mathematics on a firmer logical basis. This hope to find a rigorous logical basis for mathematics led him to pursue the project later called *logicism*: the reduction of the claims of mathematics to a basis in a small set of axioms and their logical, deductive consequences.

This logicist program culminated in Russell and Whitehead’s *Principia Mathematica* of 1910–13. The three-volume work, which provided a logical analysis of the basic notions of set theory and number theory, represented the most detailed and rigorous development of the conception of logical analysis that Russell had originally reached, at least in embryonic form, around the turn of the century, and which the Vienna Circle authors themselves

cited as a definitive inspiration for their own project. As early as 1900, Russell, rejecting the holism and monism that characterized the then-dominant Hegelian Idealism, had declared the utility of an analytic approach: "That all sound philosophy should begin with an analysis of propositions, is a truth too evident, perhaps, to demand a proof."¹² Russell's colleague Moore had used the term "analysis" in *Principia Ethica* (1903) to characterize his own investigation of the concepts of ethics. Russell's theory of descriptions, expounded in the 1905 article "On Denoting," demonstrated the utility of the method by offering a powerful early example of a successful logical analysis, showing that the actual meaning of a large class of sentences could be exhibited, against the obfuscating effects of ordinary language, by clarifying their underlying logical form.¹³

Subsequently, Russell articulated and defended the "logical-analytic" method again in 1914 in the lectures that became *Our Knowledge of the External World*.¹⁴ Here, it formed the methodological basis for a wholesale project of epistemological clarification of the nature and basis of empirical knowledge. Russell's work in the foundations of set theory had led him to suggest that the referents of a large variety of ordinary-language terms might be treated as "logical constructions" of simpler elements. In the particular case of ordinary spatial objects of perception, for instance, analysis could decompose them into the simple sensible particulars that made them up and exhibit the logical relations among these particulars. Analysis, he suggested, could resolve the "inferred entities" of ordinary experience into the logical constructions that they in fact were; in this way, their ultimate constituents would be revealed and the possibility of our knowledge of them explained.¹⁵

For all of the early analytic philosophers who appealed to logical structures in practicing the new methods of analysis, a primary motivation for the appeal was their desire to safeguard the *objectivity* of contents of thought, over and against the threat posed by subjectivist theories of them. Only *logically* structured contents, they thought, could genuinely be objective in the sense of existing wholly independently of anyone's acts of thinking of them, grasping them, considering them or entertaining them. Frege's conception of the objectivity of logically articulated contents of thought, and his resultant polemics against psychologistic and historicist theories of content, figured prominently in his writings on logic and the foundations of mathematics from nearly the beginning of his career.¹⁶ A similar motivation, directed initially against the then-dominant post-Hegelian Idealism, underwrote Russell's initial realism about "propositions" and "meanings" and his resultant conviction that logical analysis could demonstrate, through decomposition, the actual constituents of the world.¹⁷ For Schlick, Carnap and other members of the Vienna Circle as well, an analysis of the logical structure of the propositions of science was essential to demonstrating their objectivity and distinguishing them from the claims of pseudo-science or metaphysics. Only by displaying their underlying logical structure, Schlick and Carnap thought, could the propositions of empirical science be purged

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of any essential dependence on ostensive or demonstrative elements, and so portrayed as genuinely independent of the acts or occasions of their discovery or verification.¹⁸

Logical analysis, as it was first conceived within the tradition, therefore sought to demonstrate the actual logical relations that determine the contents of thoughts or propositions, and so also the meaning of the linguistic terms that express them. But the first analytic philosophers (in particular, Frege, Moore, and Russell) did not yet see their methods as grounded primarily or specifically in the analysis of language. Their attention to ordinary language most often had the aim of exhibiting its tendency to obfuscate and conceal rather than any analysis of language for its own sake. For Russell (at this time) and Frege as well as for Moore, the object of investigation was “thoughts,” “concepts,” “meanings,” or “propositions” (conceived as non-linguistic but structured constituents of the world) rather than words or sentences.¹⁹ In *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism*, culled from lectures he delivered in 1918, Russell described his method of analysis as dividing the world into mutually independent “facts,” each of which were further decomposable into more basic simples or particulars. Most basically, Russell thought, a fact was what made a proposition true or false; its further logical decomposition would resolve the particular simple objects to which the simplest terms of such a proposition, if fully analyzed, refer.

The young Wittgenstein, in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, drew out the semantic and ontological consequences of this “logical atomism” for the relationship of language to the world. With its invocation of “logical form” as responsible not only for the laws of logic but the *possibility* of any meaningful language, the *Tractatus* was the first to suggest that the solution to the problems caused by the forms of ordinary language could lie in analysis of these forms themselves. They were to be elucidated by means of reflection on the varieties of sense or nonsense they permit; by drawing a line between sense and nonsense, the analyst could hope to clarify the logical structure shared by language, thought, and the world. The suggestion, and its quick reception (and partial misconception) in the logical empiricism of the Vienna Circle, brought the structuralist conception of language in its fully developed form to bear on the problems of philosophy and the meaning of everyday language alike.

Although the structuralism of early analytic philosophy was not, initially, explicitly linguistic, the structuralist conception of language as a totality of signs governed by logical rules thus appeared relatively quickly to be the most natural setting for its distinctive methods of analysis. It captured, as well, much of what analytic philosophers explicitly carried forward from earlier philosophical projects, and hence came to define the relationship of early analytic philosophy to the larger philosophical tradition which it sought to update. One important precedent for the structuralist picture of language as a system governed or determined by rules for the intercombination of signs was the logical system of Leibniz. In some of his earliest writings, Leibniz

had suggested the idea of a *mathesis universalis* or “universal character,” a symbolic language of logic that would, like Frege’s own “concept-writing,” clarify human reasoning by giving it a unified, systematic mathematical calculus for the evaluation of the validity of arguments and conclusions.²⁰ Russell’s first substantial philosophical work, written in 1900, took up the question of the relationship of Leibniz’s conception of logic to his metaphysics against the changed backdrop of the new forms of logic derived from Frege and his recent forebears, and Rudolf Carnap cited Leibniz’s project approvingly as a precedent for his own logical analysis project in his first masterpiece, *The Logical Structure of the World*.²¹

To this determinative rationalist influence deriving ultimately from Leibniz, the philosophers of the Vienna Circle added a picture of experience drawing on the empiricism of Hume, Locke, and Berkeley, as well as the positivism of Mach, Poincaré, and Duhem. Logical analysis was, among other things, to clarify the inherent structure of the given contents of experience, clarifying its simple elements and describing their structural interrelationships. But even more methodologically decisive for the Vienna Circle’s project of linguistic and logical analysis was the legacy of Kant’s critical project of tracing the boundaries of reason’s legitimate employment in relation to our knowledge of the world. Several of the Vienna Circle philosophers had themselves been deeply influenced by the neo-Kantianism of philosophers like Cassirer, Cohen, Natorp, and Rickert.²² These philosophers had already undertaken to update Kant’s critical project by reflecting on the way the formal and symbolic structures of language condition the possibility of human knowledge. Now, the availability of the new methods of logical analysis suggested that formal logic itself could be the basis for a critical delimitation of the boundaries of language or of sense, clarifying the scope of possible experiential meaning and thus carrying forth the Kantian limit-fixing project in an updated logical-linguistic mode.

From near the beginning of its itinerary, the structuralist conception of language existed in an uncertain relationship with the empiricist conception of subjective experience that also regularly accompanied it. Beginning in the late 1920s, the philosophers of the Vienna Circle envisioned the analysis of scientific propositions as elucidating the total logical structure of science, as well as the possibility for some of its claims—the so-called “protocol sentences”—to be directly *verified* by experience.²³ The ensuing debate about the form of protocol sentences and their relationship to the other propositions of science touched on a large number of interrelated philosophical issues within epistemology, metaphysics, and the nascent field of “philosophy of mind.” But at the core of many of these issues was the question of the relationship of language, conceived as a total structure of rule-bound symbols whose meaning is defined only relationally, to immediate, first-person experience.²⁴ The structuralist conception of language and objectivity demanded that the concepts of science be defined by their structural role in the system of science as a whole, independently of their relationship to

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experience. But in order to distinguish genuinely empirical propositions from non-empirical ones, it was necessary to give an account of the role of experience in grounding or verifying them. The question of the status of protocol sentences—in particular, whether they should be pictured as verified by experiential events outside the realm of logically structured, objective science or as ordinary elements within this structure—was never resolved by the participants of the Vienna Circle themselves. Subsequently, Schlick's murder in 1936, along with the political events of the 1930s, led to the Circle's breakup and the indefinite suspension of its project.

During and after World War II, the new forms of analysis and projects of what was only then first widely called “analytic” or “analytical” philosophy proposed new methods and means of linguistic clarification, reflection, and critical demarcation.²⁵ These methods ranged from those of the “ordinary language” school that developed at Cambridge and Oxford to Quine's logical “regimentation” of ordinary language using the formal apparatus he had learned from Carnap's original syntactical project. Essential to many of these new projects was their repudiation of what they took to have been the Circle's “reductionism” and “verificationism.”²⁶ In the widely influential “Two Dogmas of Empiricism” of 1950, Quine sought to replace the “dogmas” of analyticity and reductionism with a *holistic* picture of confirmation that drew explicitly from Neurath's earlier anti-foundationalist conception of the structure of language.²⁷

Subsequent historical retellings of the development of the analytic tradition have often seen Quine's argument, and the more general repudiation of verificationism that quickly became established wisdom, as essential to the abandonment of the original methods of analytic philosophy, in particular the *decompositional* method of analysis that had been suggested by Frege, Russell and Carnap. But as we shall see over the next several chapters, attention to the ongoing role of structuralist assumptions about language demonstrates the actual continuance of the most significant methodological threads of the original project even in those postwar projects that claimed most directly to repudiate it.²⁸ For the ambiguities of the relationship of logical structure to its elements that had proved fatally problematic for the Vienna Circle's project of analysis remained in place, and continued to produce characteristic difficulties for structuralist reflection on language and its meaning, even when “reductionism” was replaced with “holism” and verificationism was replaced with a more nuanced conception of empirical confirmation.²⁹

My aim in identifying the influence of structuralism upon the analytic tradition is not to impose a false unity upon a tradition that has certainly been marked, at least since the 1950s, by an extremely diverse and heterogeneous set of philosophical methods and practices.³⁰ But I do hope to show the deep and pervasive way in which the methods and results of many of these practices, even including the ones that have officially rejected structuralism or sought explicitly to limit its influence, can be seen as deeply

influenced by the problems and ambiguities that arise from it. These problems and ambiguities have continued to exert a decisive influence on the methods and results of analytic philosophy, I shall argue, long past the widespread mid-century rejection of reductive and atomistic forms of “conceptual analysis.”³¹ Indeed, even many of those contemporary projects that reject the entire idea of a specific relevancy of linguistic reflection to the problems of philosophy, preferring to define themselves as pursuing “meta-physics” (in some non-pejorative sense) or empirical contributions to psychology, sociology, or biology, nevertheless inherit styles of argumentation, methods of reasoning, and writing practices that originated within the earlier project of structuralist analysis and remain subject to its specific instabilities. Historical reflection on the origin and persistence of these instabilities within the methods of analytic philosophy helps to demonstrate the contemporary relevance of these projects to the (still very much open) question of the nature and basis of linguistic meaning, and of the continuing possibility of philosophy’s recourse to it.

In choosing the term “structuralism” to characterize the particular set of commitments underlying the picture of language that has been most widely influential within the analytic tradition, I intend also to gesture toward the close conceptual and methodological connections between this set and the tradition of European (chiefly French) thought that has been called by the same name. Although my chief concern here is to identify and trace the role played by the structuralist picture of language in the analytic tradition, the texts of philosophers, linguists, and anthropologists such as Saussure, Jakobson, Lévi-Strauss, and Benveniste show the influence of a similar picture just as pervasively.³² The sustained inquiry into the systematic character of language and linguistic meaning begun by Saussure has, over the course of the twentieth century, situated and given essential shape to the political, social, and philosophical contributions of phenomenology, psychoanalysis, and critical thought. Part of my hope in characterizing this inquiry as parallel in many important respects to the analytic one is that the unfortunate and divisive legacy of disregard and mutual misunderstanding that has existed, throughout the second half of the twentieth century, between representatives of the two structuralist traditions, European and Anglo-American, can be recognized as baseless and finally overcome, presumably to the mutual benefit of both.

II

From the beginning of the tradition, the structuralist picture of language as a totality of rule-governed signs directed the attention of analytic philosophers toward the analysis of the structure of propositions, facts, or terms and the systematic clarification of their logic. This structuralist clarification, at first (for instance in Frege) cited logical rules that were conceived as underlying the objectivity of thought in an ideal sense, quite independently of the actual *practice* of language. But with the explicit turn to language, philosophers

quickly began to see reflection on linguistic practice as the most natural home for analysis of logical or grammatical structure. At this point, it became natural to consider linguistic terms and sentences as, among other things, objects of *use*. Such use is, besides being explicable in terms of rules or regularities, to be understood as essentially publicly and intersubjectively learned and controlled. The fifth commitment that has often been held by analytic philosophers who have held a structuralist conception of language, accordingly, concerns its essentially *public* nature:

5. The rules or regularities that constrain the use of language are essentially *public*, *intersubjective*, and *social* in character.

This commitment is logically independent of the other four. As we have seen, the first analytic philosophers, Frege and Russell, did not hold it. But it is already at least implicit in Schlick and Carnap's descriptions of the project of analysis as grounded in the elucidation of "rules of use" governing the application of terms in the practice of a language as a whole. It would soon thereafter come to play an increasingly explicit role in many philosophers' statements of their own projects. It follows, in any case, naturally enough from structuralism's picture of language as a system or structure of rule-governed signs. Once language itself is seen as a regular structure of signs governed by rules determinative of meaning or meaningfulness, it is natural to suppose that the relevant rules are primarily applicable to, and evident in, the establishment and maintenance of social practices, especially communicative practices of judgment, assertion, rational evaluation, and criticism.

In many of the texts of immediately postwar analytic philosophy, in particular, commitment to the "public character" of language was held to be essential to repudiating the *individualistic* or methodologically *solipsistic* assumptions of earlier philosophical projects.³³ Here, it was supposed, only a fundamental insistence on the essential publicity of linguistic concepts and their basis in intersubjective practices of using and learning language could remedy the (now widely repudiated) reductionist and foundationalist assumptions of an earlier phase of analytic reflection. Insistence on the essential publicity of language and concepts seemed to offer new and pervasive grounds, as well, for continuing the critique of *psychologism* that had figured centrally in the analytic tradition's methods of logical reflection. For if our very access to the concepts in terms of which we describe our immediate experience is dependent on our understanding of a language, learned in public and controlled by public criteria of applicability, then there is no hope for psychologistic theories of meaning that base it instead in the experiences or phenomena of an individual mind, consciousness, or subject of experience.

A socially based theory of the learning and communication of linguistic terms and their regular interrelationships thus came to seem requisite for a comprehensive understanding of the structure of language itself.³⁴ The hope for such a theory indeed became almost ubiquitous in the projects of

mid-century analytic philosophy of language. The continued complicity of these projects with structuralist assumptions about language was hardly noted. But as we shall see, the fundamental problems and inherent ambiguities of the structuralist picture of language in fact remained determinative in producing the theoretical tensions to which these projects of analytic reflection were repeatedly prone.

Significantly for the continuing reception of the analytic tradition, the fifth assumption of structuralism about language continues to play a pervasive role, as well, in prominent projects of analytic philosophy today. The thought that an accounting for linguistic meaning and meaningfulness depends on a description or analysis of social practices of assertion, communication, and judgment, plays a foundational role, for instance, in the projects of Davidson, Dummett, Brandom, Kripke, and Rorty, among others.³⁵ For these philosophers, the rules, regularities, or norms that determine the actual and correct usage of terms and locutions in a language are to be discovered, at least in part, in the *institutions* of social practice that govern the intersubjective behavior of the language's speakers in discourse and communication. Such social practices are inextricably connected with non-linguistic *praxis* as well, and normally include our ordinary ways of interacting with and shaping our environments. What they involve, on any particular occasion, is thought largely to be learned along with, or as an essential part of, the learning of a first language. After they are learned, they are maintained, and enforced, through essentially intersubjective and social mechanisms for the evaluation, critique, endorsement or censure of particular linguistic performances, insofar as these performances comport, or fail to comport, with them.

In some recent projects, social practices are seen as providing an explanation not only for the actual facts of language use, but also for the *normativity* of language or concepts and the *rationality* of their users. That is, our social practices are seen as providing a basis not only what we in fact do say, in a variety of contexts and situations, but for determinations of what we *should* say if we want to draw rational inferences, or respond appropriately to the utterances of our peers, or cooperate with them in making claims that lead us reliably to the truth. The various practices of deliberation, correction, consideration and evaluation that normally accompany the venturing and verification of claims in everyday discourse are thus seen as embodying, through the rules or norms of usage ordinarily governing them, the claims of *reason* or *rationality* to which traditional philosophy devoted a complex and self-critical reflection. The real object of this traditional reflection can then be seen as, in Sellars' memorable phrase, the socially inculcated and maintained "game of giving and asking for reasons," the set of communicative practices ultimately responsible both for the meaning of propositions and the validity of the claims they formulate.

Some of the contemporary and recent philosophers who assume a basis for the meaningfulness of language in publicly learned and socially maintained

practices claim to draw inspiration from the late Wittgenstein, and in particular from his considerations of “rule-following” and the idea of a “private language” in the *Philosophical Investigations*. On a hasty reading, it can indeed seem as if Wittgenstein’s scattered references to the forms of human understanding, thought, and perception as grounded in “language-games” articulate a (perhaps largely “implicit” or suggestive) theory of these forms, or indeed of the “practice of language” itself, as grounded in regular, describable, public social practices or institutions. Such an account is often seen, moreover, as including a “use-theory” of meaning that accounts for the significance of the various terms of language by reference to the facts or norms of their ordinary application. Partisans of such an interpretation often hold that Wittgenstein himself did not work out such a theory in detail, but that one could be developed, consistently with Wittgenstein’s underlying intentions, either through empirical research into sociology, psychology, linguistics, biology or some combination thereof, or through philosophical description of the underlying structure of our practices.³⁶

Such interpretations, as I shall argue, ignore not only Wittgenstein’s life-long and methodologically essential animadversions against mistaking positive theory (especially of an empirical type) for philosophical work, but indeed miss, as I shall argue, one of the most significant critical points of the *Investigations*. This point is not at all to confirm or consolidate accounts that place rule-bound practices at the basis of the ordinary meaningfulness of language. It is, rather, almost the direct opposite: to criticize the structuralist conception of rules and rule-following that provides the ordinary setting for such accounts on the level of their picture of language as a whole. Taking Wittgenstein to be supporting a “practice”-based account of language, commentators and subsequent philosophers have largely missed the deep and pervasive way in which his consideration of rule-following actually undermines any such account.³⁷ They have thus persisted uncritically in a structuralism about language and practices that a fuller reading of Wittgenstein’s internal critique of structuralism otherwise might have, long ago, taught them to doubt.

Indeed, the assumption of a social basis in intersubjective practice for linguistic meaning and meaningfulness has repeatedly obscured the far-reaching *critical* implications of the analytic tradition’s sustained consideration of the structuralist picture of language. Even when, as with Wittgenstein’s critique of rule-following or Quine’s thesis of the indeterminacy of radical translation, these critical consequences have appeared with a fair degree of explicitness, they have seemed, within the ambit of social-practice accounts of language, simply to bear against one or another more restricted picture of the structure of language, and their more general significance as internal critiques of structuralism has been missed. The usual result has been the continuance of an underlying structuralism about language, despite relatively superficial changes in the form it takes, and a recurrence of the problems to which it leads.

III

Grounded in the envisioning of language that is decisive for analytic philosophy, the structuralist picture of language has articulated, for many of the philosophers within the tradition, the specific relevance of language for philosophy and so comprised the theoretical basis for a wide variety of projects of analysis, clarification, description, and explanation. And even among those philosophers who have not accepted all of its claims or made its influence explicit, the structuralist picture has played a decisive role throughout the twentieth century in thematic and methodological conversations about language and its relevance to the methods of philosophy. But the structuralist picture of language is constitutively unstable and even actively self-undermining in a historically significant way. Its instability, I shall argue, repeatedly troubles the positive theoretical ambitions of the projects of the analytic tradition that have depended on it. The particular historical and conceptual dynamic to which this instability leads, moreover, has repeatedly determined the inquiry of twentieth-century philosophy about language and philosophy's access to it, playing a key role in generating many of the specific developments of theory and practice that the tradition has witnessed.

The instability that repeatedly troubles the structuralist picture arises directly from its own essential commitments. Recall, in particular, the second commitment of the structuralist picture sketched above. This commitment requires that ordinary linguistic use be describable in terms of a body of *rules* or *regularities* conceived as determining or constraining it, and furthermore requires that these rules or regularities be intelligible and describable. It was the hope of partially or fully describing them, indeed, that most directly supported the original project of logical analysis undertaken by Russell, Carnap, Schlick and others, and this hope has continued to play a decisive role in the analytic tradition even after the empiricist and positivist commitments of these particular philosophers were widely repudiated. But the constitutive instability that troubles the structuralist picture is apparent as soon as we ask how such a description of the rules and regularities underlying language is itself possible.

The question of the possibility of articulating the rules or regularities definitive of the normal or correct use of language is clearly an essential one for the structuralist picture and all the methodologies of analysis, clarification, and reflection it supports. If language is to be conceived as a total system governed by expressible rules or regularities, it is essential, in particular, to know how these rules or regularities are to be conceived as actually operating to determine or constrain linguistic practice. Why should we think of these rules rather than others as the correct ones? What shall we say to someone who, willfully or ignorantly, refuses to follow them? Even once we have determined the underlying rules, what verifies the legitimacy of our critical application of them to pass judgment on ordinary locutions? How shall we justify our uncritical acceptance of them in everyday practice, and

how shall we account for our learning them in childhood? And what is it that allows the rules or regularities to confer meaning or meaningfulness upon the (otherwise bare and “lifeless”) signs whose use they constrain?

Such questions are often dissimulated, within structuralist projects, by means of a negative analysis of the meaningfulness of their own constitutive terms; but they are bound to appear decisive whenever structuralism itself is articulated or defended. Thus structuralism, having presented the constitutive rules and regularities as the essential determinants of the system of language, comes to demand an account of the basis of their existence and the force of their legitimate application. But the demand to give such an account faces the structuralist theorist with an exceedingly general and apparently irresolvable dilemma. The dilemma can be simply stated: does the basis for the existence and legitimacy of the rules and regularities constitutive of the system of language lie inside or outside this system itself? A natural and recurrent response, when faced with the demand to account for the existence and legitimacy of the rules and regularities constitutive of language, is to posit their basis in some grounding item or phenomenon outside language itself. For instance, their basis may be located in the intentionality of consciousness, or the ostensive demonstration of some object or image that is seen as determining the *correct use* of the word that is demonstrated along with it. Such an item, if located outside the system of signs itself, must be (in respect to its ability to determine meaning) ineffable or indescribable, lying as it does outside the range of application of the conditions of meaningfulness it explains. But if the original basis for the existence and legitimacy of the constitutive structure of language is ineffable, it cannot after all do the explanatory work that was required of it. If the description of the total structure of language depends on the invocation of a mute, ineffable presence that, itself, cannot be described, then the justificatory question about the basis of this structure and the ultimate source of the meaning of signs must finally go unanswered.

If, on the other hand, the basis for the system of language is positively described as existing within the system itself, the description invites the question of its own meaningfulness and application. The description of the basis of the existence and force of linguistic rules thus leads to a repetition, rather than a solution, of the question it was supposed to answer. Thus the theoretical proposition and application of structuralism, which invites, almost as soon as it is formulated, the question of its basis, cannot comfortably locate this basis either outside or inside the total economy of language. Its descriptions of language and applications of these descriptions to its analysis thereby experience an ongoing and unstable oscillation, whereby the sought principle and source of linguistic meaning is repeatedly located outside the total system of language, only to be brought again within it.

Wittgenstein’s gloss on Frege’s reaction to formalism illustrates this oscillation particularly clearly. Although the views of the formalist philosophers to whom Frege reacted were explicitly restricted to the philosophy of

mathematics, Frege perceived within these views the key commitments of the structuralist picture of language. Conceiving of mathematics as a formal, abstract system of logical rules for the manipulation of symbols, the formalists hoped, all of mathematics could be described as a calculus of signs that were themselves devoid of any intrinsic meaning. But this structuralist picture of mathematics invited the recoil evident in Frege's reaction. Rejecting the claim that meaning can be completely explained by the system of language itself, the recoil seeks to identify the basis of meaning, instead, with something outside this total system. As Wittgenstein notes, it is characteristic of this recoil to cite, as essential for meaning, something beyond the material signs of language or their regular combination and recombination: something, for instance, like the animating intentionality of an idea or mental image, or the meaning-conferring force of an ideal sense. Frege himself thought that his conception of *contents of thought*, existing outside the subjectivity of any individual mind but also outside the total economy of language, could provide the needed basis. But as Wittgenstein says, the introduction of any such item, *within* the economy of language, as the principle of meaning, amounts always only to the introduction of another sign, comprehensible (if at all) simply as another element of the generality of language:

If the meaning of the sign (roughly, that which is of importance about the sign) is an image built up in our minds when we see or hear the sign, then first let us adopt the method ... of replacing this mental image by some outward object seen, e.g. a painted or modeled image. Then why should the written sign plus this painted image be alive if the written sign alone was dead?—In fact, as soon as you think of replacing the mental image by, say, a painted one, and as soon as the image thereby loses its occult character, it ceases to seem to impart any life to the sentence at all. (It was in fact just the occult character of the mental process which you needed for your purposes.) ...

As a part of the system of language, one may say, the sentence has life. But one is tempted to imagine that which gives the sentence life as something in an occult sphere, accompanying the sentence. But whatever accompanied it would for us just be another sign.³⁸

Insofar as we can understand the sought basis of meaning as such at all, it will be by understanding its effects on the use of signs; insofar as we cannot so understand it, it is simply a further mystification. But to understand the effect of an item or object on the use of signs is already to inscribe it within a total picture of the use of signs. The attempt to satisfy the protest against the totality of the structuralist picture of language ends by inscribing the basis of meaning, initially located outside the picture, within this picture itself, producing no ultimate satisfaction but only a repetition, on other grounds, of the same underlying complaint.³⁹

The paradoxicality of this theoretical situation is exceedingly general. It arises almost inevitably, in fact, as soon as serious reflection about the nature and limits of language begins. Priest (2003) has recently documented the arising of paradox in a variety of philosophical projects, both inside and outside the analytic tradition, that grapple with questions about the limits of thought or language. As he argues, it results whenever two natural theoretical requirements are fulfilled. The first requirement is *closure*: that it be possible to refer to or generalize over the totality of elements of a given kind (e.g. everything sayable, thinkable, etc.). The second is what Priest calls *transcendence*: that there be a regular operation which, given such a totality, generates an element that is outside it.⁴⁰ The satisfaction of these two elements, as Priest argues, leads to a general and pervasive form of paradox. For given the closure of the totality of language (or thought), we can then use the transcendence operation to generate a new element that is outside this totality. But the new element is itself sayable or describable—it must be, if we can refer to it at all—so it is also within the totality of the sayable (or thinkable). This generates an inconsistency at the limits of thought and language that Priest describes as informing the traditional projects of philosophers ranging from Aristotle and Anselm to Kant and Hegel. In its specifically linguistic form, however, the paradoxical dynamic of inclusion and exclusion at the limits of thought is endemic to any systematic attempt to theorize language as a total structure. This attempt in itself produces closure in articulating a conception of the totality of the meaningful or sayable; and any articulation of the basis of the rules or principles that constrain meaning amounts to transcendence. The result is the constitutive instability that Wittgenstein locates in Frege’s reaction to the formalists, and that recurs in various forms throughout the history of the tradition, whenever the supposed basis for the determinate applicability of the rules and regularities of language to specific instances of linguistic use is itself described.

The effects of this dialectic of appropriation and expropriation are conspicuously discernible in the longstanding analytic debate about the role of various forms of “givenness.” Whereas appeals to the “given contents of experience” or to the givenness of facts were experienced as relatively unproblematic in the positivist and empiricist projects of the nineteenth century (witness, for instance, Mach’s positivist analysis of the facts of science as uniformly grounded in such givenness), analytic philosophers began to question them, early in the tradition, on the basis of their own understanding of language as a structure of signs. The critique particularly singled out for criticism claims of the ineffability of the given, claims which seemed to place it beyond the total structure of language. One of the first versions of this interrogation was Neurath’s physicalist criticism of Schlick’s conception of protocol sentences as grounded in the “ineffable” fact of our experiential relationship to the world. Given Neurath’s structuralist understanding of language, the specter of such an ineffable grounding of empirical content from outside the totality of language could only appear to be

the last remnant of a metaphysical picture of meaning which a thoroughgoing physicalism about language would successfully repudiate. From Neurath's program, widely perceived as successful even if unsupported by any decisive triumph of his arguments over Schlick's, grew (largely through Quine's adherence to it) the subsequent forms of physicalism that analytic philosophy inherits as "naturalism" today.⁴¹

In this particular debate as well as subsequently within the tradition, "givenness" in a broad sense has figured not only as the ineffable content or character of experience but also as the (putative) semantic privilege of first-person or indexical utterances or the "original intentionality" or meaning that is supposed by some philosophers to characterize mental states that underlie meaningful language.⁴² Its most pervasive and obvious form in the contemporary dialectic of analytic philosophy is probably the invocation of "qualia," supposed facts or properties of the immediate, ineffable first-person quality of experience. But its problems are closely related, also, to those of the role of ostensive demonstration in (what is sometimes supposed to be) the fixation and regulation of linguistic meaning.⁴³ Starting with Neurath, analytic philosophers have regularly criticized appeals to the "given" on the basis of structuralist considerations about language; just as regularly, its invocation in one form or another has served, within the tradition, as an inarticulate protest against the totality of those considerations.⁴⁴ Where structuralist methods would totalize our understanding of language as that of a regular structure of signs, adherents of the "given" in its various forms protest the possibility of this totality by claiming to introduce facts, events, or objects that both exceed the grasp of this totality of signs and are purported to account for the basis of their meaning.

By explicating the general form of the paradox of inclusion and exclusion that arises naturally from the key commitments of the structuralist model, Priest's framework also reveals the deep formal similarity between this paradox and some of the most significant formal results of the analytic tradition, most notably Russell's paradox and Gödel's incompleteness theorem. Each of these results historically marked the failure of a strongly formal and reductionist program of logical analysis and structural description, showing respectively that Frege's axiomatization of set theory and the logicist program of reduction of mathematics to a language like that of Russell and Whitehead's *Principia Mathematica* could not succeed. Although Russell's paradox and Gödel's proof are both essentially negative results, demonstrating the impossibility of carrying out projects that were once thought definitive of the program of logical and linguistic analysis, we can nevertheless learn from them about the internal dynamics, development, and implications of structuralist programs of analysis and explanation in general. In this way, the rigorous formal attempt to account for mathematics as a logically founded structure suggests, by its own failure, the possibility of a more critical reflection on the existence of language and our ordinary and philosophical access to it.⁴⁵

In describing the structuralist picture as self-undermining in this way, I am not claiming that its commitments are individually false or even, in any straightforward way, individually or jointly incoherent. Indeed, the picture is almost inevitable, as soon as systematic reflection on the basis of linguistic meaning begins; and this reflection has begun as soon as ordinary language has the ability to refer to itself and thus take up, however implicitly or vaguely, the question of the meaning of its words. The tendency of the picture, in its more complete formulations, to undermine itself demonstrates, as I shall argue, an underlying and genuine instability in ordinary language itself, one that inhabits this language wherever and whenever, in the varied occasions and circumstances of life, the meaning of terms or expressions is at issue. The aim of the present analysis is therefore not to suggest any alternative theoretical picture of language or to suggest that we somehow drop the structuralist picture from our everyday use of, and reasoning about, language. It is, rather, to document the effects of its detailed theoretical pursuit on the texts and projects of analytic philosophy, and say something about the critical significance of these texts for the question of our relationship to the language we speak.⁴⁶

IV

The reading of the analytic tradition that I carry out here draws centrally on Wittgenstein's lifelong inquiry into the nature of language and its implications for human life. One paradigm for it, in fact, is the project of philosophically based clarification of language that Wittgenstein articulates in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*.⁴⁷ For decades, interpreters took the *Tractatus'* description of the principles of "logical form" underlying the structure of language and the world to contribute to a structuralist project of *line-drawing*, closely akin to the logical positivists' attempt to purge language of metaphysics by clarifying the boundaries of factual language. Such demarcation projects do, indeed, in general depend on the structuralist picture, relying as they do on a general specification of the rules governing meaningful language to produce both a detailed understanding of its structure and a guide to the limits of its legitimate employment. But the claim that the *Tractatus* is involved in such a project sits poorly with one of its own most pervasive theoretical claims, the claim that logical form cannot be stated or described, but only "shown" through an ongoing philosophical activity of clarification:

4.121 Propositions cannot represent logical form: it is mirrored in them. What finds its reflection in language, language cannot represent. What expresses *itself* in language, we cannot express by means of language. Propositions *show* the logical form of reality. They display it.

It follows from the *Tractatus'* own internal picture of language, indeed, that any linguistic expressions that would aim to articulate bounds of sense by

specifying the rules of logical form that determine them would, themselves, be nonsense. In the penultimate proposition of the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein famously intimates that a kind of insight can result from the transcendence of these propositions, from our recognition of them as nonsense. The claim that we ought to take this intimation completely seriously, indeed that the theoretical propositions of the *Tractatus* are genuinely and completely nonsense, is the guiding principle of a line of interpretation of the *Tractatus*—the so-called “resolute” interpretation—that has recently been formulated and gained some popularity.⁴⁸ On the resolute interpretation, the aim of the *Tractatus* overall is edifying or elucidatory rather than theoretical. The point of its apparently theoretical propositions is simply to demonstrate their own meaninglessness, thus producing a deflationary or enlightening effect on the reader who might formerly have taken them—or propositions like them—seriously as descriptions.

Analysis, as it has been understood in the tradition since Russell, aims to reveal logical form, to show the true or underlying structure of linguistic utterances over against the superficial forms of ordinary or everyday language. Such analysis would culminate in showing the categorical, inferential, and semantic structure of language overall, exhibiting the complete set of rules of significance and practice that govern meaning and inference. But the “resolute” interpretation of the *Tractatus* suggests a very different—almost opposite—understanding of the results of analysis. For on the interpretation, analysis shows not only the structure of language itself but also the meaninglessness of any linguistic expression that would attempt to articulate that structure, any expression that would articulate a logical or grammatical rule capable of demarcating meaningfulness from meaninglessness. If this is right, the attempt to describe the “logical form of language” undermines itself in the very moment of its expression. Along with it goes the possibility of forming a stable picture of language as a whole as a rule-bound unity, and all the explanatory or normative force that that picture might have been thought to have. Since the articulation of any formal principle of structural meaning undermines itself, the philosophical attempt to enforce the boundaries of meaning by distinguishing between “meaningful” and “meaningless” propositions also collapses under its own weight. All propositions are, as such, meaningful; and the activity of philosophical clarification works only within the medium of ordinary language and can no longer presuppose any standard of sense drawn from outside it.⁴⁹ In this way, the actual incoherence of the structuralist picture of language as a whole emerges as the most pragmatically significant result of the theoretical practice that had sought to elucidate it.⁵⁰

V

From the beginning of the career of the structuralist picture within analytic projects, descriptions of analysis often combined a guiding commitment to

its methods with a thematic disavowal of the problematic of the basis of meaning to which they actually responded. In 1934, for instance, Carnap described the project of analysis as requiring the elucidation of a “logical syntax” that would display the logical structure of language, without, however, implying anything about “meaning” itself:

By the “logical syntax” (or also briefly “syntax”) of a language we shall understand the system of the formal (i.e., not referring to meaning) rules of that language, as well as to the consequences of these rules. Therein we deal first with the formative rules (*Formregeln*), which decree how from the symbols (e.g., words) of the language propositions can be built up, secondly with the transformation rules (*Umformungsregeln*), which decree how from given propositions new ones can be derived . . . The formation and transformation of propositions resembles chess: like chess figures words are here combined and manipulated according to definite rules. But thereby we do not say that language is nothing but a game of figures; it is not denied that words and propositions have a meaning; one merely averts methodically from meaning. One may express it also thus: language is treated as a calculus.⁵¹

Thus Carnap can say that language is to be treated *as* a calculus, without making any claims about its actually *being* such a calculus (such a claim he would, indeed, have deemed metaphysical) or about the actual basis of the bearing of its rules on the life of its use. Starting in the late 1920s, indeed, he would treat this bearing itself as a matter of convention, leaving it, in accord with his “principle of tolerance” up to language users to stipulate whatever conventions of use suited them in the varied projects of their lives.

This tendency to practice structuralism methodologically while disavowing the truth or meaningfulness of its explicit commitments is in fact a recurrent gesture of twentieth-century analytic philosophy. It plays a role, not only in Carnap’s definitive project, but in a wide variety of projects that judge the meaningfulness or possibility of various (philosophical or non-philosophical) claims, even (and especially) while disavowing the inclination to explain or account theoretically for the possibility of meaning itself. Some contemporary projects, for instance, even while purporting to establish strongly revisionist consequences with respect to ordinary usage, nevertheless continue to disavow any particular interest in the analysis of meaning.⁵² Others present their philosophical task simply as consisting in the schematization or “systematization” of pre-existing “intuitions.” In both cases, structuralist considerations of the systematic meaningfulness of terms continue to play a central methodological role, even though they are no longer grounded in an *explicit* picture of the structural basis of meaning.

In any case, Carnap’s statement invokes a faith in the separability of doctrine and method that the subsequent dialectic of the analytic tradition

would effectively and repeatedly call into question. The question of the relevance of the life of language's practice to its structuralist analysis, which the young Quine was the first to pose in relation to Carnap's own project, challenges the methods of structuralism to demonstrate their utility to our understanding of the ways language is actually employed, of the desires it serves and the forms of intelligibility it permits. Structuralism, even when pursued "purely methodologically," predetermines the nature of language as that of a regular structure of signs, and so can only subsequently present this relevance as their indifferently specified "use," arbitrarily or conventionally determined by stipulation or decision. Against this, the historical dialectic of structuralism and those who have contested it evinces the actual and pervasive ambiguity of the relationship of language to life, its inherent complexity and the failure of this attempt at pre-determination.

The disavowal of the question of meaning evident in Carnap's statement of a purely methodological structuralism aims to eliminate the taint of metaphysics which may still adhere to the explicit statement of structuralism's commitments. But rather than eliminating the fundamental instability of these commitments, it inscribes it in the dialectic between the adherents of the structuralist project (both in its thematic and "methodological" forms) and those who contest its specific versions. The history of the successes and failures of the projects that have aimed to understand language, over the course of the twentieth century, demonstrates the ongoing effects of this dialectic. In it, those who would contest the totality of structuralism's commitments repeatedly point to their inadequacy in accounting for specific phenomena of the ordinary life of meaning. Structuralists subsequently respond by echoing Carnap's gesture, disavowing the need to account for meaning, along with the theoretical meaningfulness of these commitments themselves. Such is the dialectic of structuralism and its inarticulate contestation in which much of the twentieth-century attempt to comprehend language has remained confined. The historical recounting that interrogates its underlying motivations aims to bring the sources of the dialectic to light and thereby to show their regular effect on our understanding of the meaning of language.

VI

The analytic tradition's sustained inquiry into language and linguistic meaning has often presupposed and promulgated the structuralist picture that treats language as a total structure of signs. But with and beyond the formulation and articulation of this picture, the methods and results that have articulated its constitutive instabilities and paradoxes comprise another legacy of the analytic tradition, a significant *critical* legacy of thinking about language in relation to everyday life that may represent one of the tradition's most important outcomes for the philosophical future. Like the

results that marked the failure of Frege's axiomatization of set theory and of the logicist program, the critical results of the tradition's sustained consideration of the structuralist picture of language may at first seem to be wholly negative in character, demonstrating simply the failure of structuralism to account adequately for the ordinary phenomena of linguistic meaning. But like the legacy of an earlier age of critical thought in relation to the conceptions of reason it interrogated, the results that articulate the constitutive inadequacies of the structuralist picture bear consequences far beyond their tendency to repudiate the specific theoretical pictures to which they react. Just as Kant's critical interpretation of the constitutive inadequacies of reason's self-understanding did at an earlier time, the reading that traces the inherent tensions of the structuralist picture in the history of the analytic tradition exhibits the broader ethical, social, and practical consequences of linguistic reason's ongoing dialogue with itself.

The sustained analytic critique of our relationship to the language that we speak operates primarily by interrogating the categories that articulate a pervasive and general conception of the nature of linguistic meaning, as it is assumed to determine the acts and institutions of everyday life. When Frege conceived of the possibility of using a regular, symbolic language to clarify the underlying logic of thought, he took it for granted that only the rules of such a language could explain the possible determinacy and objectivity of judgments leading to truth. With respect to the ordinary language that Frege himself wanted to criticize, the ultimate source of this objectivity of judgments could only be the rule-governed identity of *senses* that, distinct from either the symbols of ordinary language or their referents, nevertheless ensured the possibility of uniform reference to objects in the world. Such senses might indeed coordinate only poorly with terms in everyday language, but one of Frege's key insights was that a logical notation could nevertheless make them perspicuous and thereby exhibit their regular and essential role in determining the actual reference of these terms.⁵³

The first projects of analytic philosophy, like Frege's, pictured the identity of senses as grounded in their status as universals or idealities. Later projects conceived of it as grounded in the regularity of social practices, including the regularity of evaluative and reflective procedures for determining the "actual" sense of an utterance. The difference between these types of projects in the way they account for the unity and identity of sense is less important, in a historical context, than their shared assumption of the existence of an intelligible ground, accessible to philosophical analysis of language, for ordinary judgments of sameness and difference of meaning. By pursuing the implications of this assumption in the texts and projects that have developed the implications of the structuralist picture most clearly, we can bring into view, as well, the tradition's sustained internal critique of it.

The best model and example of this internal critique is the late Wittgenstein's consideration in the *Philosophical Investigations* of the nature of rules

and rule-following. As in the *Blue Book*, Wittgenstein's discussion in the *Investigations* begins by taking up the deep sources of the temptation to understand language as a structure of signs:

All this, however, can only appear in the right light when one has attained greater clarity about the concepts of understanding, meaning, and thinking. For it will then also become clear what may lead us (and did lead me) to think that if anyone utters a sentence and *means* or *understands* it he is operating a calculus according to definite rules.

(PI 81)

Over the next 120 paragraphs, Wittgenstein considers the basis and implications of this picture of language as a calculus and the conception of rule-following that it depends on.⁵⁴ Central to the consideration is the description and diagnosis of a “mythology” of meaning that attributes to a learner who develops a mathematical series or uses a word or sentence correctly the knowledge or understanding of a rule with the superlative capacity to determine an infinite number of instances of application “in advance,” as if pre-inscribed in some item or symbol that the learner grasps in understanding how to go on. Wittgenstein's method of consideration and diagnosis of this picture, here, is a descendant of the one he used in the *Blue Book*; by noting that any item that manifests understanding of a rule is itself nothing more than a symbolic expression, and so is open to various interpretations, he exposes the conception of rule-following in terms of superlative items as empty and inadequate to its explanatory purpose. The conception, and the structuralist picture that it underlies, lead to the famous “paradox” of PI 201:

This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because any course of action can be made out to accord with the rule.

(PI 201)

Here as elsewhere in the analytic tradition, seeing the force of the paradox requires interrogating the deeply held assumptions of the structuralist picture and the various conceptions of language and practice that depend on it. Given the structuralist picture that envisions the total description of the rules governing and constraining the everyday practice of language, the paradox of PI 201 arises almost inevitably and marks the picture's inability to explain what it seeks to. By interrogating the roots of this picture, Wittgenstein's inquiry also interrogates the deeply held assumptions that can make the structuralist picture of language and its associated conception of rules seem simply obvious and unquestionable wherever the nature of language is in question.

Beginning in 1965, Saul Kripke put the Wittgensteinian “rule-following paradox” in a clear and general form that has subsequently made his version

of it widely accessible and broadly discussed.⁵⁵ As is familiar, Kripke presents Wittgenstein's considerations as introducing or inventing a new and unprecedented form of "skepticism" about the possibility of linguistic meaning. Its basis is the challenge that Kripke's "bizarre skeptic" poses to an ordinary interlocutor. The challenge is to justify the claim that one's present usage accords with one's past usage, for instance that my previous acts of computation actually accorded with the normal function "plus" rather than the bizarre function "quus."⁵⁶ The skeptic demonstrates that there is no fact about this previous usage that demands that I meant "plus" rather than "quus," since any such fact can be interpreted as according with either function. The conclusion that Kripke pictures the skeptic as drawing is that:

There can be no such thing as meaning anything by any word. Each new application we make is a leap in the dark; any present intention could be interpreted so as to accord with anything we may choose to do.⁵⁷

To this paradox, Kripke responds with a "sceptical solution" that, without denying the truth of the conclusion, seeks to provide grounds for asserting that, even despite it, "our ordinary practice . . . is justified because—contrary appearances notwithstanding—it need not require the justification the sceptic has shown to be untenable."⁵⁸ In particular, Kripke suggests that such a solution is to be found in what he construes as Wittgenstein's replacement of *truth conditions* (conditions for the truth of propositions) with *assertibility conditions* that simply record the circumstances under which we are allowed to make various assertions within our ordinary "language game."⁵⁹ The suggestion enables Kripke to offer what has been called a "communal" or "communitarian" picture of rule-following as grounded in the evaluative procedures of a community that subjects individual responses to criticism on the basis of their agreement or disagreement with the responses that are normal within "our shared form of life."⁶⁰

In the years since Kripke's initial formulation of the paradox, discussion of his work has grown to comprise a vast literature.⁶¹ Much of this literature consists in attempts to evaluate or criticize the legitimacy of Kripke's "communitarian" solution to the rule-following paradox, either as a reading of Wittgenstein or in its own right, or attempts to replace it with one or another form of alternative "solution." My aim in this work in relation to the Wittgensteinian "paradox" of *PI* 201 is, however, different from these. Instead of trying to find a solution that protects "our ordinary practices" from philosophical criticism based in reflection about possibilities of meaning, I have attempted to trace some of the ways in which these ordinary practices are in fact regularly interrogated, questioned, criticized and problematized by the implications of the "philosophical" problem that Wittgenstein (among others) discovers. For the distinction between the ordinary life of our "practices" and the forms of "philosophical" reflection on them is nowhere

more complicated, regularly contested, and open to criticism than in those manifold occasions of (“ordinary” or “philosophical”) life where linguistic meaning is itself open to question, and where Wittgenstein’s problem about this possibility may therefore be seen to operate.

Paraphrasing Wittgenstein, Kripke at one point describes the temptation to supplement “our ordinary concept of meaning” with additional superlative facts that would answer to the skeptic’s worry as “based on a *philosophical* misconstrual—albeit a natural one—of such ordinary expressions as ‘he meant such-and-such’, ‘the steps are determined by the formula’, and the like.” (pp. 65–6; my emphasis). A good way to begin a renewed critical tracing of the complicated and various implications of the analytic tradition’s sustained inquiry into language for the ordinary life of “our practices” is to ask what is “philosophical” and what is “natural” about this kind of response, what (false?) forms of reflection or pictures of life motivate it or seem to demand it, what specific instances of ordinary life are likely to prompt it, and what determines that it is indeed a “misconstrual” of these instances.⁶² Both Kripke’s project and many of those that explicitly oppose him refer to “ordinary practices” only in order to find grounds for insulating them from the threat that philosophical skepticism is supposed to pose. In so doing, they predetermine the question of meaning that is the site of Wittgenstein’s paradox as “philosophical” in a pejorative sense. They thereby miss the significance of the regular arising of this question in the course of the pursuit of our “ordinary practices” themselves.

VII

By understanding the implications of Wittgenstein’s internal critique of the structuralist picture of language in the *Investigations*, it is possible to see some of the deep methodological parallels that exist between the analytic tradition’s sustained consideration of language and the neighboring traditions of phenomenology, critical theory, and deconstruction. These traditions, like the analytic one, have centrally taken up the nature of language and the question of its accessibility and relevance to philosophy. As we shall see, the methodological course of these traditions’ treatment of language, arising in part from Saussure’s structuralist picture of language as a “system of differences” without positive terms, Husserl’s logically articulated and anti-psychologistic phenomenology of linguistic meaning, and the neo-Kantian influences that shaped Heidegger’s inquiry into the meaning of being, indeed significantly parallels the analytic tradition’s inquiry into language through the whole course of its development.⁶³

For all of these “continental” projects the investigation of language in relation to the human life that it articulates ultimately yields far-ranging critical consequences for the metaphysics that underlies both ordinary and philosophical conceptions of language. In 1927, near the beginning of the introduction to his masterpiece, *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger wrote of

the need for philosophy to reconsider the forms and concealments of the tradition it inherits:

If the question of being is to achieve clarity regarding its own history, a loosening of the sclerotic tradition and a dissolving of the concealments produced by it is necessary. We understand this task as the destructuring of the traditional content of ancient ontology which is to be carried out along the guidelines of the question of being.⁶⁴

This call for a de-structuring of the history of philosophy's consideration of the meaning of being has resonated throughout the variety of phenomenological and hermeneutic projects that have grown from it in the course of the twentieth century. With respect to the legacy of metaphysical thinking, indeed, the critical motivations underlying this call were not far removed, either in form or content, from those that philosophers like Carnap and Wittgenstein cited in relation to their own critical projects.⁶⁵ For these philosophers as for Heidegger, taking up the tradition of metaphysics, whether approvingly or critically, requires an inquiry into the limits of its structure and the structural basis of its claims, an inquiry whose goal is not the adumbration of theory but rather the attainment of clarity about the implications of these claims.

When Heidegger wrote in 1927, he did not yet accord the question of the structure of language itself any decisive priority in this project, or in the methods that were to accomplish it. But the structuralist tradition of Saussure, Lévi-Strauss, and Benveniste meanwhile gave the question of language, and the structuralist picture of it, a central place in the pursuit of questions of meaning and significance in the discourses of phenomenology and hermeneutics that had inherited Heidegger's project. In the 1966 article "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," Jacques Derrida brought these legacies together in a far-reaching description of the problematic dynamics of language and its structure.⁶⁶ The classical and historical discourses of the history of philosophy have always, Derrida suggests, sought explanatory structures with which to account for knowledge, truth, meaning or understanding; and in so doing, have characteristically sought to ground these structures in an *item* or *presence* (what Derrida calls the "center") that is itself not a member of the structure it grounds:

It would be easy enough to show that the concept of structure and even the word "structure" itself are as old as the episteme—that is to say, as old as Western science and Western philosophy—and that their roots thrust deep into the soil of ordinary language, into whose deepest recesses the episteme plunges in order to gather them up and to make them part of itself in a metaphorical displacement. Nevertheless, up to the event which I wish to mark out and define, structure—or rather the structurality of structure—although it has always been at work, has

always been neutralized or reduced, and this by a process of giving it a center or referring it to a point of presence, a fixed origin . . . As center, it is the point at which the substitution or the transformation of elements (which may of course be structures enclosed within a structure) is forbidden . . . Thus it has always been thought that the center which is by definition unique, constituted that very thing within a structure which while governing the structure, escapes structurality. This is why classical thought could say that the center is, paradoxically, *within* the structure and *outside* it. The center is at the center of the totality, and yet, since the center does not belong to the totality (is not part of the totality), the totality *has its center elsewhere*. The center is not the center. The concept of centered structure—although it represents coherence itself, the condition of the episteme as philosophy or science—is contradictorily coherent. And as always, coherence in contradiction expresses the force of a desire.⁶⁷

The desire that Derrida speaks of is the same one that Wittgenstein finds at the basis of Frege's criticism of the formalists. It arises, as we have seen, wherever a structuralist account demands the basis of its own structurality in an element or item external to its own order, leading to the historical dynamic that has played itself out repeatedly, as we shall see over the next several chapters, in the development of the analytic tradition over the course of the twentieth century. As Derrida explains, the tendency to produce this dynamics of "contradictory coherence" is present wherever philosophy seeks to ground the explanatory claims of its structures on an item of presence, basis, or center that is itself conceived as ungrounded; and the project of this grounding is none other than the history of metaphysics that Heidegger interrogates. But because the language of the metaphysics that Heidegger sought to de-structure is also deeply implanted in (indeed, inseparable from) the language of the everyday, the integrity of its structure attains a certain new level of self-consciousness when, in the twentieth century, the problematic of its critical reading becomes entwined with that of the structure of language overall:

The event I called a rupture, the disruption I alluded to at the beginning of this paper, presumably would have come about when the structurality of structure had begun to be thought, that is to say, repeated, and this is why I said that this disruption was a repetition in every sense of the word. Henceforth, it became necessary to think both the law which somehow governed the desire for a center in the constitution of structure, and the process of signification which orders the displacements and substitutions for this law of central presence—but a central presence which has never been itself, has always already been exiled from itself into its own substitute. . . . This was the moment when language invaded the universal problematic.⁶⁸

Those who today inherit the methods of analytic philosophy, with its penchant for expository clarity, precisely defined problems, and rigorously signaled argumentation, may at first be reluctant to take up the pursuit of Derrida's complicated deconstructive reading of the history of metaphysics. But the dynamics of structure that the deconstructive reading identifies in the history of metaphysics have themselves played a decisive role in the origin and development of these very methods. The envisioning of language in which many of the most significant projects of the analytic tradition are rooted encounters the problematic of grounding that Derrida describes as soon as it pictures language as a total structure of signs. In manifold forms across the decades of the tradition's development, its theories and claims, results and methods, have demonstrated the implications of this problematic for our understanding and practice of the bearing of language on life. Understanding them can help us not only to overcome the crippling legacy of distrust that still exists between representatives of the analytic and continental traditions, but to comprehend the great significance of the *shared* project of envisioning language that has, in deeply parallel but seldom appreciated movements of theory, analysis, interpretation, and practice, linked them over the course of the twentieth century, and continues to define their legacy for the philosophical future.⁶⁹

Part I

Early analytic philosophy

2 Frege on the context principle and psychologism

The “context principle” articulated by Gottlob Frege, holding that a word has significance only in the context of the sentences in which it appears, has played a determinative role in the projects of analytic philosophy’s investigation of language and sense. It was in the *Grundlagen der Arithmetik* of 1884 that Gottlob Frege first formulated it; there, he describes it as crucial to his groundbreaking analysis of the logical articulation of the contents of thought. Such contents, Frege thought, must be *objective* in the sense of being independent of subjective mental states and acts of individual thinkers or subjects of experience. It was particularly important to him, therefore, that the context principle could be used to help demonstrate the inadequacy of existing *psychologistic* theories of content that accounted for it in terms of subjective states or events. In this chapter, I shall examine this connection between the context principle and Frege’s argument against psychologism in order to better understand its significance for the most characteristic methods and results of the analytic tradition as a whole. As is well known, the critique of psychologism that Frege began would also prove decisive for the projects of the philosophers who followed him in defining this tradition; for the young Wittgenstein as well as for Carnap, for instance, it was essential to the success of analysis that it adumbrate purely *logical* relations owing nothing to psychological associations or connections. Later on, as has also sometimes been noted, the context principle would figure centrally within projects of analyzing or reflecting on the *use* or *practice* of a language as a whole.

I

Frege twice asserts in the *Grundlagen* that observing the context principle as a methodological guideline is practically necessary if we are to avoid falling into a psychologistic theory of meaning or content, according to which content is dependent on mental or psychological states or events. Thus formulated, the principle tells us that, rather than looking for the meaning of individual words in isolation, we should begin by considering words only in the context of the sentences in which they figure. The first suggestion of a connection between it and antipsychologism comes near the beginning

of the *Grundlagen*, where Frege lays out the “fundamental principles” of his investigation:

In this investigation I have adhered to the following fundamental principles:

There must be a sharp separation of the psychological from the logical, the subjective from the objective;

The meaning of a word must be asked for in the context of a proposition, not in isolation;

The distinction between concept and object must be kept in mind.

To comply with the first, I have used the word “idea” [*Vorstellung*] always in the psychological sense, and have distinguished ideas from both concepts and objects. If the second principle is not observed, then one is almost forced to take as the meaning of words mental images or acts of an individual mind, and thereby to offend against the first as well.¹

At this point, the suggestion of a connection between the observance of the context principle and the avoidance of psychologism is only programmatic. Frege does not say, here, *how* the two are connected, or *why* we must think that seeking the meaning of words in isolation will “almost” force us into subjectivist psychologism. Frege’s second mention of the context principle in the *Grundlagen* provides more detail. It comes in the course of his attempt to define the concept of number, after he has already argued that numbers are independent, self-standing objects, and that each judgment about a number contains an assertion about a concept. Frege considers an objector who challenges the mind-independence and objecthood of numbers on psychological grounds. Such an objector may hold that the conception of numbers as objects cannot be sustained, since we have no idea or image of many numbers; numbers expressing very small or large quantities or magnitudes, for instance, routinely outstrip our ability to provide intuitive images in thought or imagination to represent them. Frege’s response does not dispute the truth of the psychological claim, but instead suggests the replacement of the psychologistic procedure with a logical one:

We are quite often led by our thought beyond the imaginable, without thereby losing the support for our inferences. Even if, as it seems to be, it is impossible for us as human beings to think without ideas, it may still be that their connection with thought is entirely inessential, arbitrary and conventional.

That no idea can be formed of the content of a word is therefore no reason for denying it any meaning or for excluding it from use. The appearance to the contrary doubtless arises because we consider the words in isolation and in asking for their meaning look only for an idea. A word for which we lack a corresponding mental picture thus appears to have no content. But one must always keep in mind a complete proposition. Only

in a proposition do the words really have a meaning. The mental pictures that may pass before us need not correspond to the logical components of the judgment. It is enough if the proposition as a whole has a sense; its parts thereby also obtain their content.²

Our quantitative judgments about great distances, or about the size of objects, like the Earth, that are vastly larger or smaller than us, do not rest on our ability to form a mental image of anything accurately representative of the magnitudes involved. But this does not deprive our judgments of warrant or show that they do not concern genuine objects. Indeed, Frege avers, our temptation to think that these judgments *must* be contentless arises from our temptation to identify the meanings of their constituent terms with the intuitive images or mental pictures that occur to us as we hear or consider them in succession. When, because of the inherent limitations of our intuitive faculties, we cannot supply a mental image for a particular term, for instance “the size of the Earth,” we may then be tempted to conclude that the term has no meaning. But we can, after all, make judgments about magnitudes even when they far exceed our intuitive grasp; and although we attach no intuitive content to the idea of there being 0 of any particular type of object, nevertheless our quantitative judgments involving 0 are unimpaired.

The possibility of making such judgments meaningfully, Frege suggests, itself suffices to defend the objecthood of numbers against the envisaged objection. That they can be made at all shows that these judgments concern entities that do not depend on our particular intuitive abilities. Frege’s defense of the objecthood of numbers therefore rests, in this case, on a notion of content according to which judgments may have particular, well defined contents even if some or all of their key terms cannot be supplied with representative *intuitive* images. Given this notion of content, it will be possible to construe the possibility of content-bearing judgments as demonstrating the existence of the objects to which their terms refer. But this conclusion will itself, Frege claims, depend on our considering the contents of sentences as logically prior to the meanings of their individual terms. Beginning with sentence-level contents, we are to identify their real “logical components,” components which may not correspond to anything identifiable as the meanings of the sentence’s constituent words. It will be these true components of the judgment, rather than the mental accompaniments of individual words, that determine the actual existential commitments of the judgment as a whole.

Two sections later, Frege further specifies the sort of judgments we should begin with in order to determine the actual logical content and existential commitments of judgments involving numbers:

How, then, is a number to be given to us, if we cannot have any idea or intuition of it? Only in the context of a proposition do words mean

something. It will therefore depend on defining the sense of a proposition in which a number word occurs. As it stands, this still leaves much undetermined. But we have already established that number words are to be understood as standing for independent objects. This gives us a class of propositions that must have a sense—propositions that express recognition [of a number as the same again]. If the symbol a is to designate an object for us, then we must have a criterion that decides in all cases whether b is the same as a , even if it is not always in our power to apply this criterion. In our case we must define the sense of the proposition

“The number that belongs to the concept F is the same as the number that belongs to the concept G ”;

that is, we must represent the content of this proposition in another way, without using the expression

“the number that belongs to the concept F .”

In doing so, we shall be giving a general criterion for the equality of numbers. When we have thus acquired a means of grasping a definite number and recognizing it as the same again, we can give it a number word as its proper name.³

Having already argued that numbers are objects and that judgments about number are judgments about concepts, Frege realizes that judgments of the equinumerosity of concepts are at the same time judgments that “express recognition” of particular numbers, that identify a number as the same again in a new case. Given this, the possibility of judgments of equinumerosity suffices to defend the objecthood of numbers against any objection based on the possible failure of intuition to provide images corresponding to them. The possibility of judging that the number belonging to one concept is the same as the number belonging to another provides what an intuitive image cannot: the identification of a particular number as an object, self-identical and re-identifiable in ever-new situations in our judgments of equinumerosity.

Frege’s general reason for requiring a distinctive kind of logically defined content that arises primarily at the level of sentences, then, seems clear. Only by recognizing such a level of content, he claims, will it be possible to underwrite the objectivity of judgment and the existence and mind-independence of its objects. This recognition moreover depends on our according priority in the practice of logical analysis to sentence-level contents. For considering words in isolation will debar us from recognizing their real logical contents and force us to construe their contents as consisting in their idiosyncratic psychological accompaniments. The application of the context principle in the *Grundlagen* thus requires that contents on the sentential level play a role

not only in determining the meaning or content of sentences, but also in allowing the possibility of their terms making objective reference.⁴ For Frege's argument moves, as we have seen, from the recognition of the significance of judgments of equinumerosity to the ontological conclusion that number-terms refer to self-standing, independent objects. The general ontological conclusion would not follow if determinations of the meaning of sentences did not also provide general conclusions about the references of the terms which make them up. The sort of content that shows up in the analytic practice that Frege suggests will be *logical* content, moreover, in that it is at least partly determined by inferential and deductive relationships between sentences in the language. Only this sort of content, because of its determination by logical relations, rather than intuitive or psychological ones, can legitimately participate in logically relevant judgments about the identity of referents. Accordingly, only this sort of content is qualified to ground the *possibility* of objective reference.

One might wonder, however, what it is about the role of this kind of content in judgment that entitles it to enjoy this special claim to ground objective reference. Part of the answer lies in Frege's conception of intuition not only as subjective but also as essentially *private*. In "The Thought," for instance, he argues that intuitive images are not only subjective but also, because of the impossibility of knowing the contents of another's mind, strictly private and incommunicable.⁵ If this is right, then reference to an intuitive image by itself will clearly be of no use in an argument attempting to establish the objectivity of what it represents. But even if this is the case, we may still wonder why *logical* content, simply because it is related to and determined by logical relations of deduction and inference among sentences, should fare any better. For one thing, it is not at all obvious why intuitive contents, even if themselves private, could not at least provide a basis for the public, potentially objective judgments of equinumerosity to which Frege appeals. When Frege wrote, he was well aware that empiricists like Locke and Hume had provided detailed theories of abstraction to account for the possibility of meaningful judgments about mathematics and numbers even when these judgments exceed direct, intuitive support. And Frege's conversant, Husserl, would soon provide a complex anti-psychologistic theory of abstraction that portrayed particular acts of numerical judgment as grounded in individual intuitive acts.⁶ On any of these theories, the judgments that Frege appeals to as lacking intuitive support, and so exemplifying an alternative sense of content that does not rely on intuition, are construed instead as arising from concrete, intuitive contents by way of a process of abstraction. If these theories of abstraction are at all plausible, Frege's examples of judgments lacking in immediate intuitive support are not decisive. Moreover, it is difficult to see how the context principle could make the important difference that Frege says it does, if what is at issue is simply the privacy of intuitive contents. For it is not initially clear why the contents of sentences should be any less dependent on intuition than are the

contents of words, taken alone; and if they are just as dependent on intuition, they must, on Frege's view, be just as private, and hence just as incapable of grounding objective reference. Alternatively, if there is a distinctive, logically robust kind of content in virtue of which judgments are both public and potentially objective, it is far from obvious why single words, even "considered in isolation," could not have content in this logically robust sense as well.

II

What is needed to make Frege's claims for the importance of the context principle intelligible is a notion of a kind of non-intuitive, logically defined content, defined primarily at the level of sentences rather than words and capable of demonstrating the objectivity of the referents of their terms. Such a notion of content can indeed be found, at least implicitly, in Frege's conception of logical analysis. It results from his view of the relationship of the comprehension of a sentence to the determination of its *truth-conditions*. Whatever kind of meaning an individual word might be thought to have, individual words do not possess truth-conditions of their own; the possibility of making a claim that is true or false emerges only at the level of sentences. Frege will consistently connect this feature of sentences—that they alone are apt for truth or falsehood—to his conception of the content of sentences as determined by their inferential relations. This notion of content indeed provides an alternative to any intuitionist or psychologistic account. As Dummett has argued, it also suggests that Frege's doctrine of thought is inseparably entwined with a general consideration of the *use* or *practice* of a language, a consideration that Frege himself did not explicitly undertake, but can be seen to be all but explicit in his account.

Throughout his career, Frege understood "thoughts" as, definitively, contents *capable* of truth or falsity. As early as the *Begriffsschrift* he gave this conception a prominent role in his practice of logical analysis. Here, he linked the logical content of a sentence with its inferential role, understanding two sentences to express the same thought if and only if they have the same set of inferential consequences and antecedents.⁷ This *inferentialism* about content provides substantial justification for extracting from Frege's method of logical analysis a conception of the role of sentences that accords them a special status. For if logical contents are determined by inferential roles, it will evidently only be sentences that can have logical contents of this sort. For *only* sentences have their own, identifiable roles in the process of inference.⁸ But if Frege's appeal to the context principle is to establish the anti-psychologistic conclusion, it must draw a further nexus between the truth-aptness of a sentence-level content and its ability to establish both the potential *objectivity* of its claim and the *objecthood* of its referents. Following Dummett, we can bring out this nexus, in a way sympathetic to Frege's project of analysis, by situating that project within a

broader consideration of linguistic *use*. In the context of this reflection, the special aptness of sentence-level contents for truth or falsity is just one aspect of a broader privilege of sentences in the practice of a language. We can express this privilege by noting that a sentence is the smallest unit by which a speaker can effect the linguistic act of asserting a judgment. Thus Dummett reconstructs the basis of the context principle as the recognition that any characterization of the senses and references of individual words must be dependent upon a characterization of the possible uses to which they may be put in sentences:

To assign a reference to a name or a set of names . . . could only have a significance as a preparation for their use in sentences. . . . More generally, the assignment of a sense to a word, whether a name or an expression of any other logical type, only has significance in relation to the subsequent occurrence of that word in sentences. A sentence is . . . the smallest unit of language with which a linguistic act can be accomplished, with which a “move can be made in the language-game”: so you cannot do anything with a word—cannot effect any conventional (linguistic) act by uttering it—save by uttering some sentence containing that word.⁹

As Dummett says, any ascription of content to individual words will be, in general, unintelligible unless specified in terms of the difference it makes to the acts that can be effected by the sentences in which they figure. The intelligibility of the particular contents of particular words thus rests on a prior appreciation of the particular semantic tasks of claiming and asserting that they can contribute to accomplishing. But because they can only accomplish these tasks when combined with other words in sentences, our logical understanding of the contents of individual words must apparently rest on a prior appreciation of the contents of the sentences in which they can appear.

This way of reconstructing Frege’s views indeed provides a natural way of understanding the basis of his claims for the objectivity of thought. Throughout his career, as Dummett points out, Frege held as well that successful linguistic communication of a thought requires that hearer and speaker agree in attaching the same sense to a sentence. Of course it is possible for this agreement, in particular cases, not to obtain. But when it does not, the divergence in sense must, according to Dummett, at least be objectively discoverable; it must be possible, in other words, to find rational grounds for clarifying the sense of a sentence that do not depend essentially on any fact of psychology or inner mental processes.¹⁰ And, as Dummett also points out, Frege had at least the outlines of a powerful and general account of what such agreement on sense consists in. On the account, what speaker and hearer agree on in agreeing on the sense of an assertoric sentence is its truth-conditions. Understanding a sentence means knowing

which facts or circumstances will make it true and which will make it false, and successful communication requires agreement in this understanding. For this agreement, private items or accompaniments are irrelevant; all that matters is that we associate with a sentence the same, objective and factual, truth-conditions. Indeed, on Frege's view as Dummett reconstructs it, the special role of sentential-level contents in underlying objective reference is naturally explained as a result of the possibility of our coming to agree on the truth-conditions of sentences. Objective reference is possible only insofar as it is possible to agree on criteria for the judgment of identity of reference; and such agreement is itself a matter of agreement on the truth-conditions of sentences expressing the requisite judgments.

A significant effect of Dummett's reading is to yield grounds for resisting, in a way that coheres with the spirit of Frege's thought if not the letter of his commitments, his Platonistic claims about the existence of a "third realm" of thoughts and the problematic metaphor of the "grasping" of senses residing in it. For if Dummett is right, to grasp the sense of a sentence is just to know its truth-conditions.¹¹ Such knowledge can reasonably be held to be wholly manifest in ordinary, observable usage. In any case, we have no reason to suspect that it will escape intersubjective verifiability in the way that private mental events or intuitive images could. Even though Frege did not himself have any developed account of the intersubjective practice of a language, construing him, as Dummett does, as at least implicitly something like a "use-theorist" of meaning thus allows us to endorse Frege's claim for the objectivity of thought without requiring that we concur with what has often seemed the most problematic aspect of this claim, namely commitment to a Platonic third realm. The potential objectivity of contents of thought is itself explicable, on this line, as the direct outcome of intersubjective agreement on truth-conditions. And this agreement is evident, and verifiable, in ordinary practices of assertion and justification, of giving and asking for reasons for claims entertained and evaluated.

III

If this account of Frege's appeal to the context principle is correct, its application in Frege's method of analysis already inaugurates a comprehensive inquiry into the systematic functioning of sentences in a language as a whole. In Frege's own case, as we have seen, this commitment can also reasonably be taken to be the methodological basis for the criticism of psychologism that Wittgenstein himself would later take up and extend. Following Dummett, we may indeed take Frege's application of the context principle against psychologism as the first significant application, within the analytic tradition, of reasoning about the systematic logical structure of language to the question of the nature of linguistic meaning and reference. Its most direct purpose, as we have seen, is to guarantee the possibility of objective reference by demonstrating its grounding in regular criteria for the

identification and re-identification of objects. Such criteria, Frege's line of thinking suggests, are perspicuous only in the context of judgments of identity and non-identity. And the possibility of such judgments depends on the existence of sentential senses that fix the truth-conditions of the sentences whose senses they are.

Nevertheless, there are deep, essential, and determinative problems, both of an internal and external kind, with the view that Dummett attributes to Frege, and indeed with the pervasive and general commitment it expresses. To begin with, there are good reasons to doubt that Frege himself could actually have held anything like a "use-theory of meaning" given his clear desire to resist, not only psychologistic, but also historicist or socially based theories of meaning. As Green (1999) has argued, Frege's attempt to secure the objectivity of judgments was explicitly directed as much against accounts that would explain content in terms of shared public practices as those that would explain it in terms of private mental facts or accompaniments. The point of introducing the third realm was to secure a conception of the contents of thoughts as independent of what *anybody* might actually think, not simply as independent of particular individuals within a larger community. Frege's appeals to the objectivity of sense most directly support his goal of establishing or securing the objectivity of scientific investigation, a goal that theories of meaning in terms of communal linguistic use, tied as they are to the vicissitudes of actual social practice, have difficulty in satisfying. It may be the case, indeed, that something like Frege's Platonistic appeal to objectively existing senses is necessary in order to satisfy this goal. We may detect in this appeal the persistence of a mythology that Frege gives us little independent reason to accept; we may even locate in its obscure metaphor of "grasping" the undischarged remnant of the very psychologism that Frege is concerned to dispute. But it may also be impossible to accomplish Frege's goal of securing the objectivity of sense without it. In particular, it is not at all obvious that anything like a description of intersubjective social practices gives us the ability to do so.

Beyond this, it is not clear that the view that Dummett attributes to Frege is coherent, even on its own terms. We can see this by reflecting on what the context principle requires, according to Dummett, of the relationship between the senses of sentences and the senses of words in intersubjective practice. In the article "Nominalism" Dummett expresses the context principle as embodying the claim that "When I know the sense of all the sentences in which a word is used, then I know the sense of that word."¹² Elsewhere, he construes Frege's argument for the objecthood of numbers as depending upon our having "provided a sense" for each identity-statement involving numerical terms.¹³ On Dummett's view, then, the context principle asserts that the sense and reference of each word in a sentence depends systematically on the senses of *all* of the sentences in which that word can appear. Dummett furthermore interprets the sense of a word as rule, systematically dependent on sentential senses, holding that:

The sense of a word consists in a rule which, taken together with the rules constitutive of the senses of the other words, determines the condition for the truth of a sentence in which the word occurs. The sense of a word thus consists—wholly consists—in something which has a relation to the truth-value of sentences containing the word.¹⁴

According to Dummett, then, the context principle implies in part that fixing the senses of the range of sentences in which a word can appear is at least sufficient (and perhaps necessary) to determine the sense of the word. The sense of a word is itself a rule which, together with the rules for other words, determines the truth-value of each of the sentences in which it appears.

This helps to explain how, given the context principle, we can nevertheless understand (that is, determine the truth-conditions of) new sentences that we have not previously heard. On Dummett's account, we do so by comprehending the rules that govern the combination of individual words to provide determinate sentential senses. But these rules governing individual words are themselves first determined by abstraction from the interrelations of the senses of the sentences in which the words figure. Dummett recognizes that, construed as a theory of understanding, this threatens to place an impossible demand upon the competence shown by ordinary speakers. For it is evident that no ordinary speaker can ever be construed as having explicitly considered *all* (or even very many) of the infinite number of sentences in which a particular word can appear.¹⁵ As Dummett realizes and admits, this threatens to make a person's understanding of a word unverifiable in principle; for we can only test her understanding of a finite number of sentences, whereas on the view her linguistic competence with a word would have to consist in her capability of grasping each of the infinite number of sentences in which it can occur.

The epistemological side of this objection can be answered by construing our ordinary ability to understand new sentences as manifestations of a cognitive *capacity* whose actual performance need not exactly match its idealized, infinitary performance. We can, then, take ordinary performances of understanding as good (though imperfect) evidence for the requisite capacities. There might still be some indeterminacy about exactly what these capacities are, or what further performances they might underlie, but the indeterminacy will be no greater than what is normally involved, in any case, in induction from a finite set of examples.

If theorizing about language amounts to the formulation of empirical theories of linguistic competence to systematize and explain actual performance, we might well, therefore, take the objection in our stride as a necessary, though not fatal, limitation on our ability to systematize the relevant capacities completely. But behind the epistemological objection that the context principle, as Dummett applies it to the social practice of a language, threatens to make our knowledge of the sense of a word unverifiable in principle, there lurks a different, non-epistemological line of objection that

cuts much deeper. For Dummett's suggestion that Frege's conception of sense be treated as explicable in terms of socially inculcated rules for use, understanding, or comprehension exposes this conception to the open question of the ground and force of such rules. This is, at the same time, the question of the possibility of describing "meaning as use" at all; the question is whether there is an intelligible concept of "use" at all by means of which we can indeed characterize *knowing the sense of a term* as *knowing "how it is used."*¹⁶ Here (to anticipate results that would, admittedly, only be articulated much later), Wittgenstein's consideration of rule-following and the "paradox" of *PI* 201 come directly to bear. On Dummett's conception of Frege's view, to determine the sense of a word is to determine a rule that allows us, for any sentence in which the word occurs, together with the rules that determine the senses of the other words in the sentence, to determine the truth-conditions of the sentence. Of course, the sentential contexts in which any particular word may appear, and the combinations into which it may enter, are infinite and widely varied. We might, with some justice, therefore be reluctant to attempt to specify any such rules, at least before we are in a position to specify all of the rules for the language as a whole. Wittgenstein's point, however, is that (even if we have worked it out as part of a total specification of all the rules for the language) any such specification is itself a symbolic expression, and as such is open to various possible interpretations in practice. That is, if understanding the sense of a word means comprehending the rule that connects it to the truth-conditions of the sentences in which it occurs, then (as Wittgenstein argues in a more general context) any expression of such a rule can also be taken to connect the same word, in some contexts, to different truth-conditions.

The objection, put this way, is not adequately met simply by drawing a distinction between competence and performance in the practice of a language overall.¹⁷ For even if we draw such a distinction, distinguishing linguistic capacities or dispositions from the performances that issue from them, the force of Wittgenstein's paradox is that we have no ability even to identify these capacities, even where we take them to exist.¹⁸ We might speak ordinarily, for instance, of a capability to use the word "red," and take someone's finite set of (ordinary and non-deviant) occurrent sentential performances with the word to license our ascription to them of this capability. The person can, in all the cases we have yet observed, associate with sentences involving the word "red" the "right" truth-conditions, in any case the ones that we ourselves expect to be associated with those sentences. But according to the context principle, as Dummett reconstructs it, we can have no understanding of what the relevant capacity is—nor even any assurance that it is indeed a capacity relating to the same sense that we take our own sentences involving "red" to invoke—without knowing how it contributes to fixing the senses, and truth-conditions, of an infinite number of sentences. It follows that, prior to gaining knowledge of how a speaker would perform in an infinite number of cases, we can have no legitimate basis even for guessing

that a speaker's new performance with what appears to be a familiar word will conform with her prior usage. Nor can we intelligibly criticize a new performance as incorrect owing to its failure to comport with the speaker's or the community's existing standard.

The Wittgensteinian paradox poses a problem for the very possibility of a systematic understanding of a language in terms of the "rules for its use." This problem has, indeed, influenced and inflected many of the various projects that have taken up Frege's conception of sense along the lines of something like Dummett's interpretation. Since Tarski wrote in the 1930s, it has been known that it is possible to gain access to some portion of the systematic structure of truth and reference for a language by stating and systematizing the truth-conditions of its sentences. Donald Davidson, drawing on Quine's project of "radical translation," was the first to envision the project of giving a complete *theory of meaning* for a natural language.¹⁹ Such a theory would, Davidson supposed, necessarily be an empirical one, grounded in the observable behavior and reactions of the language's speakers. It would have as deductive consequences all of the (true) Tarski sentences for the language, that is, all true sentences of the form:

"Snow is white" is true in English if and only if snow is white.²⁰

By embodying the totality of Tarski sentences for the language, the envisaged theory of meaning would capture the systematic dependence of sentential sense on truth-conditions. But it would derive the Tarski sentences, Davidson supposed, from some finite number of recursive principles specifying the dependence of the senses of sentences on the words from which they are composed. The total corpus of such rules, recursively specified, would, Davidson supposed, embody what is involved in knowing a language and what is accordingly attributed to an ordinary speaker of it.²¹ Within the envisaged theory of meaning, sentential senses would thereby be regularly connected to the determination of truth-conditions and the senses of terms to their systematizable role in determining sentential senses. If it could be worked out completely and without begging any questions, such a theory would therefore vindicate Frege's conception of sense as Dummett reconstructs it, showing how the regular practice of a language follows from a distinct and particular set of specifiable rules of use.

For a time after Davidson wrote, the pursuit of such theories of meaning for natural languages became a widely pursued project.²² Nevertheless, 40 years later, there is still no general consensus on whether even one such theory is possible. Intensional contexts such as direct and indirect quotation, indexical terms, tense, and metaphor have all been cited as posing problems for its development.²³ The recalcitrance of these phenomena to a straightforward Tarski-style analysis gives grounds for thinking that the connection between meaning and truth that Davidsonian theories take as essential does not exhaust, and so does not suffice to explain, the intuitively graspable

possibilities of meaning in any natural language. More significantly in relation to Wittgenstein's paradox about rules, it is not clear what would be accomplished, even if a complete Davidsonian theory of meaning for a natural language such as English were, one day, successfully worked out. As McDowell (1983) has recently argued, there is good reason to think that a completed theory of meaning would indeed capture schematically what is involved in the grasping of the various concepts of a language, but in such a way that the schematization could only be understood by speakers already in possession of a grasp of those concepts. But to construe a theory of meaning, in this way, as incapable of conferring a grasp of the concepts whose use in the language it sets out to explain (in terminology also used by Dummett in his interpretation of Davidson, to construe it as "modest") is to construe it as having this explanatory role only against the backdrop of the ordinary practice of the language itself.²⁴ Nothing about Wittgenstein's paradox threatens the claim that we can count on an explicit schematization of the rules of use of a language to capture the senses of words *if* we can already appeal to our knowledge that our interlocutor's behavior is correctly describable in terms of her performing some familiar, general type of action.²⁵ For instance, nothing about Wittgenstein's paradox prevents us from taking a description of the rules for use of the word "red" to capture its sense, if we may presuppose that our interlocutor *already* shares our way of using the term and so attaches to it the same sense that we do. The force of Wittgenstein's paradox, however, is that nothing completely describable on the level of rules of use can ground this additional presupposition. Nothing that we can capture in a symbolic description of rules can, by itself, require of our interlocutor (even if he accepts this symbolic description) that he indeed attach the same sense to a term that we do, or demonstrate that he indeed will go on, in each of an infinite number of cases, to understand its role in determining the truth-conditions of sentences in the same way that we do.

The Wittgensteinian paradox threatens any theory that, like Dummett's, attempts to explain the senses of words wholly by reference to (what are supposed to be) rules characterizing the regular use of words and sentences in a language. It thereby raises a challenge to the coherence of the notion of regular use that Dummett sees as underlying senses, and thereby (if Dummett's interpretation is actually true to the motivations of Frege's own project) to the coherence of Frege's notion of sense itself. There are various ways to finesse the objection; for instance, Dummett himself often admits that the senses of expressions are, in general, indescribable, sometimes relying on Wittgenstein's own showing/saying distinction to hold that, in associating a term with its regular referent, we *say* (by stipulating) what its reference is to be, but only *show* its sense (namely, its way of contributing to the sense and reference of the sentences in which it figures).²⁶ Wittgenstein himself, in the *Tractatus*, held something similar about sentential senses: they were to be the way of using or applying sentences (for instance to determine truth-conditions

in particular cases).²⁷ In general, as Dummett says, the only way to specify the sense of a sentence is to provide another sentence with the same sense, and there is no reason to suppose that this will always be possible. But to hold that the conditions for the identity or difference of senses in the shared use of a language are only to be shown, and never said, is to hold that determinations of such identity and difference have no basis in anything like a description of this use itself. There is, in other words, no basis to be found, in the description of the rules underlying anyone's use of a word, for holding that they will go on using the word in the same way that they have before, or will use it the same way that I do in a new case.

IV

The problem that Frege's application of the context principle brings out is first perspicuous as the problem of the possible bearing of language on objective referents, as opposed to the merely subjective ones that would apparently be all that language could support, if psychologism were correct. But set in a larger critical context, it is actually a problem about how linguistic expressions have an application at all. That is, it is the problem of how a linguistic expression can do anything at all, how its utterance can amount, for instance, to an assertion, or how it can be evaluated, in a way regularly determined by its constituent terms, for truth or falsity. The problem, even in its more general form, was indeed already clear to Frege, as is shown by his critical discussion in *Grundgesetze* of the formalist mathematicians Heine and Thoma.²⁸ These mathematicians thought of mathematics as a purely formal game involving the rule-bound manipulation of symbols, themselves conceived as lacking any intrinsic meaning. In the course of his exhaustive and biting criticism, Frege shows that the formalists themselves constantly renege on their own commitments, repeatedly presupposing the properties of the objects that the symbols of mathematics are supposed to represent, rather than (as would have been more consistent with their own methodological principles) confining themselves simply to discussing the symbols themselves. But the core of Frege's objection to the formalist project is that any purely formal description of the rules for combining mathematical symbols would still leave open the question of the basis of the *application* of these symbols to real facts, statements, and events:

Why can no application be made of a configuration of chess pieces? Obviously, because it expresses no proposition. If it did so and every chess move conforming to the rules corresponded to a transition from one proposition to another, applications of chess would also be conceivable. Why can arithmetical equations be applied? Only because they express propositions. How could we possibly apply an equation which expressed nothing and was nothing more than a group of figures, to be transformed into another group of figures in accordance with certain rules? Now, it

is applicability alone which elevates arithmetic from a game to the rank of a science. So applicability necessarily belongs to it. Is it good, then, to exclude from arithmetic what it needs in order to be a science?²⁹

Without their applicability to real-world situations, Frege suggests, the symbols of mathematics would be as inherently empty of content or meaning as are configurations of chess pieces. As things are, however, according to Frege, the capacity of mathematical expressions to be applied is a result of their expressing *propositions*, that is, as a result of their capacity to capture *contents* evaluable as true or false. As we have already seen in connection with the context principle, this capacity also implies, according to Frege, the ability of the constituent terms of mathematical sentences (for instance number-symbols) to refer to actually existing objects. The ultimate basis for this capacity of reference, and so for the applicability of mathematical propositions in real-world contexts, is the possibility of objective judgment, for instance of those judgments of equinumerosity that Frege makes the basis of the reference of number-terms.

In his discussion of the formalists in the *Grundgesetze*, Frege therefore already situates his question of the objective reference of terms within the context of the larger and more general question of the *application* of linguistic symbols. And this question is decisive, not only for the success or failure of Frege's own account of sense, but for all of the subsequent projects of analytic philosophy that take up and develop the critical impulse implicit in it. The connection is evident, for instance, in the *Blue Book* passage where Wittgenstein comments most directly on the methodological character of Frege's thought.³⁰ In the passage, Wittgenstein effectively endorses the methodology of Frege's criticism of psychologism, while at the same time suggesting that Frege's own Platonistic theory of senses itself tends to fall afoul of this criticism. His method, like Frege's in applying the context principle against psychologism, is to consider the relationship between symbols and their application, what Wittgenstein here calls the "use" of the sign.

Reflection on this relationship of use to meaning is here, as it was in Frege's application of the context principle, to underwrite the conclusion that psychological items or mental accompaniments of speaking and understanding cannot provide the basis for an explanation of meaning. Such items or accompaniments are, in relation to the systematic functioning of language as a whole, only further symbols, and so cannot provide the basis for an explanation of how *any* symbolic meaning is possible. But by putting the objection against psychologism this way, Wittgenstein also expands the criticism initially suggested by Frege to a more general form. In this more general form, it bears not only against the thought that psychological items or accompaniments can be the basis for an account of meaning, but against the thought that anything graspable as an object can be such a basis.³¹ The conclusion holds equally for "thoughts", understood as "distinct from all signs" but nevertheless grasped in understanding them and responsible for

their capacity to carry meaning. Decisively for Wittgenstein's own later consideration of rule-following in the *Philosophical Investigations*, it holds equally, as well, for "rules of use," wherever the grasping of such rules is taken to be essential to the understanding of a language and responsible for the meaningfulness of its terms.

Commentators, including Dummett, have missed the significance of this broader application of the critical methods originally developed by Frege because they have misunderstood Wittgenstein's injunction to "look for the use" (rather than the meaning) in just the way Wittgenstein warns against in the *Blue Book* passage. That is, taking Wittgenstein to have been committed to the "slogan" that "meaning is use," they have understood his reflection on the relationship between symbols and their application to contribute to a theoretical project of describing or displaying the "rules of use" for a language as a whole. This project is supposed to bear against psychologism in that it makes it clear that no mental items or subjective phenomena can by themselves determine how a word is to be used; any such determination, it is further supposed, depends on the intelligible regularities of a public, socially learned and inculcated, practice. But in substituting a search for public conditions of meaningfulness for the earlier search for private ones, it misses the broader critical significance of the reflective methods originally brought to bear against that earlier search. For as Wittgenstein says, to "look for the use" is no better than to look for psychological accompaniments, if we thereby treat the "use" as an object potentially present to mind and thereby explanatory of the possibility of meaning. Any such object, anything capturable as a description of the right or normal use of a word or an expression of the "rule" determining it, is itself simply another sign or set of signs, still open to various interpretations. In the course of the attempt to understand what determines a sign's (right or normal) application, such descriptions and expressions in fact do no better than the description of psychological acts or accompaniments. In both cases, the gulf between symbols and their application, what Wittgenstein calls the difference between the symbols themselves and their "life" in the practice of a language,³² remains unbridged and unbridgeable by any item, rule, or principle introducible in the course of theoretical reflection.

V

Frege's application of the context principle, as we have seen, already suggested the more general thought that terms have meaning only in the context of the system of their roles in a language as a whole. His way of putting this was to say that terms have their meaning only in the context of sentences that express thoughts, or contents evaluable as true or false. In interpreting the point, he relied on considerations about the possibility of intersubjective communication, or of the possibility of agreement on the sense of a sentence. The question that is most decisive for the critical legacy

of the reflection that Frege began is: what underlies the possibility of this agreement on what we must share, if we can mutually understand a sentence at all? Frege himself could answer this question with his theory of sentential senses, his Platonist account of them as strongly objective and ideal, and his metaphorical description of our knowledge of them as the intellectual act of “grasping.” But if we find this account unsatisfying, or if we suspect, with Wittgenstein, that the obscurity of its metaphors is essential to its purported ability to explain, we will have to seek further for ground for the notion of identity of sense that plays such a decisive role in Frege’s account.

The assumption that one and the same word (or, in any case, successive tokens of the same word-type) can be used again and again, in various contexts and sentential connections, with the “same” meaning, figures so deeply in our ordinary thinking about meaning that this thinking would probably be rendered impossible without it. But the broadest implication of Wittgenstein’s reflection on symbols and their uses, and the paradox it leads to, is that there is nothing accessible to systematic reflection on the structure of language that supports this ordinary and pervasive assumption. We can, and regularly do, assume that we use words in the same ways that we always have before, that others will do so as well, that it will be more or less clear when someone has used a word differently than we do or has not explained her way of using it, that such explanations, when offered, will be readily intelligible and will lead to a reform in our own practices or a criticism of their deviant application. But it is one thing to say that we make this assumption (and even that our making it is essential to the intelligibility of what we say and do), and quite another to hold that we can, within a theory of language or its systematic structure, find grounds for justifying it.

In our ordinary language, the assumption of the identity of the sense of a word across its manifold different contexts of application is indeed systematically interwoven with the assumption of the existence of a rule underlying its use.³³ Inquiries after the justification of claims of sameness of sense will, in the ordinary practice of the language, regularly advert to rules of use, and vice-versa. But this regular interweaving does not imply that the introduction or description of rules can provide anything like a general justification for the assumption of identities of sense across the heterogeneity of contexts of employment that regularly pervades our discourse. Indeed, one way of putting the force of Wittgenstein’s paradox, in relation to the principle of identity that Frege constantly presupposes, would be to say that: *if* we needed criteria of identity to apply terms significantly, then the criteria of identity would themselves stand in need of criteria of application. Any description or formula we could introduce as accounting for our ability to use a term, in the wide variety of contexts, with the same sense, or even as determining what “the same sense” consists in, would itself still stand in need of criteria for its own application to the heterogeneity of cases. On the level of the systematic description of symbols or reflection on their application, nothing explains the assumption of the identity of senses that constantly

pervades our practice. Its justification is nothing other than itself, or the actuality of our ways of using of language to which we can, finally, only gesture mutely toward, without further explanation.³⁴

In retrospect, Frege's appeal to the context principle can be seen as inaugurating the systematic reflection on the structure of signs and the use of language that has been decisive for much of the analytic tradition. The logically based reflection he developed was sufficient to allow the statement, though not the resolution, of the paradox of signs and their application that Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* brought to its fullest expression. Frege's own Platonistic theory of the identity of sense is perspicuous, in retrospect, as an unsatisfactory attempt to resolve the paradox. Bringing it out in its general form shows, as well, the unsatisfactoriness of "use-theories" of meaning in resolving it by means of a description of (what are supposed to be) the "rules of use" for terms in a language. For Frege (or anyone else) to have found grounds on the level of such a theory to support his assumption of the identity of sense, he would have needed, in addition to his description of the systematic logical structure of a language, a theory of the pragmatic force of terms in application to the various acts and accomplishments of which language is capable.³⁵ He would have needed such a theory not only, as Dummett says, because his account of senses tied their truth-conditions to the special act of judgment, and so required an account of the pragmatic force of assertion (as distinct from, for instance, consideration, questioning, negating, and so forth), but more generally because the underlying assumption of an identity of sense across different contexts of a term's use implies the distinction between terms and their meanings, one the one hand, and the effects of their employment, on the other. But Wittgenstein's paradox of rule-following is just the most perspicuous and clearly stated of the wide variety of results of the analytic tradition that tend to suggest that grounds for drawing such a distinction between "semantics," and "pragmatics," on the level of a systematic explanation of linguistic practice, are essentially lacking.

More than 100 years after Frege's *Begriffsschrift*, we know as little as Frege himself did about what, in the systematic structure of a language, underlies the regular and pervasive assumption of the unity of the sense of a word across the heterogeneity of its contexts and applications. We know as little (or as much), indeed, as Plato did when he invoked the supersensible idea as that which all of the items rightly called by a term have in common, in virtue of which they are all rightly called by that term.³⁶ But the logico-linguistic reflection on symbols and their use that Frege began inaugurated the inquiry that, in its subsequent development within the analytic tradition, would evince the metaphysics of the identity of sense on the level of its ordinary presupposition, and so, in a radical and unprecedented way, expose language to the deeper effects of its immanent self-critique.

3 “Meaning is use” in the *Tractatus*

It has long been standard to attribute to the later Wittgenstein a “use theory” of meaning, a theory which is supposed to have replaced the “metaphysically realist” meaning-theory of the *Tractatus*. Having become skeptical of the *Tractatus*’ account of meaning as mirroring between language and the world, so the standard story goes, Wittgenstein replaced it, in the *Investigations*, with a pragmatic description of *intersubjective* communicative practice, a description he partially developed through the suggestive but puzzling concepts of “language games” and “forms of life.” I shall argue in this chapter that this interpretation of Wittgenstein’s development is misleading, and that we misunderstand his role in the history of the analytic tradition if we accept it. For the early Wittgenstein was actually more closely an adherent of the doctrine expressed by the slogan “meaning is use” than was the later Wittgenstein; and an understanding of the central role of this doctrine in the theory of the *Tractatus* is essential, as well, to understanding Wittgenstein’s decisive critical reaction to it in the *Philosophical Investigations*. The central notion of the Tractarian theory of meaning, the notion of “logical form” shared between meaningful propositions and the states of affairs they describe, itself depends on the *Tractatus*’ theory of the *meaningfulness* of signs as arising from their syntactical application according to logical rules of use. In seeing linguistic criticism as grounded in reflection on the use of expressions, the theory already captures one of the most pervasive themes of the analytic tradition’s consideration of language overall. But after 1929, Wittgenstein would also come to see it also as a characteristic expression of the *mythological* picture of language as a regular calculus that the “rule-following considerations” of the *Philosophical Investigations* directly aim to dispel.

I

The *Tractatus* has long been seen as articulating a jointly semantic and metaphysical “picture” theory of meaning that treats the meaning of a sentence as a function of its specific “logical form.” But just as important to Wittgenstein’s concerns in the *Tractatus* is an account of the *meaningfulness* of signs, an account of the possibility that otherwise inert written or spoken

signs have meaning at all. He provided this account by appealing to the concept of the *use*—or, as he put it in the *Tractatus*, the “logico-syntactical employment”—of a sign in accordance with logical rules. By examining the set of remarks in section 3 of the *Tractatus* in which Wittgenstein articulates the first version of a “meaning is use” doctrine explicitly formulated within the analytic tradition, we can understand the relationship of this central strand in Wittgenstein’s philosophical method to the reflection on meaning from which it arose, and thereby begin to understand its decisive relationship to some of the most important critical and interpretive practices of analytic philosophy.

It is well known that the *Tractatus* articulates a “picture” theory of meaning, according to which a proposition has the meaning that it does in virtue of sharing an abstract structure or form with a possible state of affairs.¹ Just as a visual picture, in order to depict a situation, must share its spatial form, any proposition whatsoever, in order to depict, must share with the possible or actual state of affairs for which it stands its “logico-pictorial” or “logical” form.² A proposition is said to share the logical form of a state of affairs when there is an isomorphism between the relational structure of the proposition and the relational structure of the state of affairs; the fact that the elements of the proposition are related in a particular way represents the fact that things are related, in the state of affairs, in the same way.³ Wittgenstein emphasized that the logical structure of a proposition can be shown clearly in the arrangement of its constituent signs; we can imagine using physical objects, rather than written signs, in various spatial arrangements to depict possible situations.⁴ But propositions as they are written in ordinary language do not always show clearly the relational structure of their logically simple elements.⁵ One task of philosophical criticism or analysis, accordingly, is to articulate these elements by rewriting ordinary-language propositions in a perspicuous notation that shows through its symbolism the logical relations that propositions express.

Many commentaries on the *Tractatus* are content to leave matters here, with the Tractarian picture theory of meaning explained as a metaphysical theory of the meaning of propositions in terms of their articulation as relational structures of signs.⁶ In so doing, although they often appeal to the analogy that Wittgenstein suggests between the spatial form of an ordinary picture and the logical form of a proposition, they typically leave the metaphysical underpinnings of the central notion of logical form somewhat obscure. A proposition’s meaning is said to consist in an “abstract” or “formal” correspondence between the relational structure of signs in a proposition (once these are logically articulated by analysis) and the relational structure of simple objects in a state of affairs. But it is not said what this correspondence amounts to, or how to recognize when a proposition has been articulated, through analysis, enough to make it perspicuous.

It is in this connection that Wittgenstein’s theory of the meaningfulness of signs, generally missed by standard interpretations, proves to be an especially

important part of the *Tractatus*' theory of meaning. The theory unfolds in a series of remarks at the thematic center of the *Tractatus*, in the immediate context of the development of the picture theory and the introduction of the idea of a perspicuous notation capable of clarifying the logical structure of ordinary propositions. It begins with a distinction that Wittgenstein draws between signs—mere perceptible spoken sounds or (token) written marks⁷—and symbols, which are signs taken together with the ways in which they signify:

3.32. A sign is what can be perceived of a symbol.

3.321. So one and the same sign (written or spoken, etc.) can be common to two different symbols—in which case they will signify in different ways.

3.322. Our use of the same sign to signify two different objects can never indicate a common characteristic of the two, if we use it with two different *modes of signification*. For the sign, of course, is arbitrary. So we could choose two different signs instead, and then what would be left in common on the signifying side?

In these remarks, Wittgenstein characterizes symbols as signs together with their “modes of signification,” their “use[s] with a sense,” or their “logico-syntactical employment.”⁸ Prior to an understanding of their logico-syntactical employment, signs themselves are inert, incapable of defining by themselves a logical form in virtue of which they could correspond to possible states of affairs. For it is, of course, arbitrary that a particular orthographic or audible sign should be chosen for a particular expressive purpose within a particular language; what makes arbitrary signs capable of signifying the states of affairs that they do—what gives them meaning—are the logical possibilities of their significant use:

3.326. In order to recognize a symbol by its sign we must observe how it is used with a sense.

3.327. A sign does not determine a logical form unless it is taken together with its logico-syntactical employment.

3.328. If a sign is *useless*, it is meaningless. That is the point of Occam's maxim.

(If everything behaves as if a sign had meaning, then it does have meaning).

We cannot understand the logical form of a symbol without understanding the ways in which the signs that comprise it are significantly used. Wittgenstein goes so far as to suggest that these possibilities of significant use define the essence of a symbol.⁹ At the same time, the possibility of understanding the uses of symbols in a proposition, what Wittgenstein calls “recognizing the symbol in the sign,” is also one of the metaphysical preconditions for the possibility of meaning. For it is only by having significant

uses that sequences of signs mean anything at all. Wittgenstein's theory of meaningfulness—his theory of the conditions under which signs have meaning at all—therefore plays an essential role in his general picture of meaning. It is only insofar as signs *have* significant uses that they have logical forms at all; and it is, of course, only in virtue of their logical forms that they can embody meanings.

For Wittgenstein, then, the sense of a sentence is defined not simply by the way in which its simple signs are combined, but by the relational structure of its signs *against the backdrop of their possible uses in the language*. If a sentence has a sense, it is because its constituent signs have significant uses that allow their combination to express that particular sense; we do not understand the sentence unless we grasp these possibilities of use. The correspondence at the basis of the meaning-making isomorphism between propositions and states of affairs is not a correspondence between signs and objects, but between symbols and objects. It is essential to grasping the logical form of a sentence—to understanding its meaning—that its simple signs be understood, not only in their combinatorial structure, but together with their possibilities of significant use or application. If there is a question about the sense of a sentence—if its logical form is not understood, even though all of the verbal or written signs are given—clarification of sense can only amount to clarification of the ways in which those signs are being used, in the context of the sentence, to signify.

II

The central Tractarian concept of logical form, then, cannot be understood except in conjunction with Wittgenstein's use-doctrine of the meaningfulness of signs. But this doctrine of meaningfulness as use also immediately suggests a process of semantic clarification whereby confusions common in ordinary language are exposed and remedied through the development of a logically purified notation:

3.323. In everyday language it very frequently happens that the same word has different modes of signification—and so belongs to different symbols—or that two words that have different modes of signification are employed in propositions in what is superficially the same way.

Thus the word “is” figures as the copula, as a sign for identity, and as an expression for existence; “exist” figures as an intransitive verb like “go,” and “identical” as an adjective; we speak of *something*, but also *something's* happening.

(In the proposition “Green is green”—where the first word is the proper name of a person and the last an adjective—these words do not merely have different meanings: they are *different symbols*.)

3.324. In this way the most fundamental confusions are easily produced (the whole of philosophy is full of them).

3.325. In order to avoid such errors we must make use of a sign-language that excludes them by not using the same sign for different symbols and by not using in a superficially similar way signs that have different modes of signification: that is to say, a sign-language that is governed by *logical* grammar—by logical syntax.

(The conceptual notation of Frege and Russell is such a language, though, it is true, it fails to exclude all mistakes.)

Philosophical and ordinary confusions typically arise, Wittgenstein thinks, from the unrecognized use of a single sign to signify in two or more different ways; accordingly, analysis proceeds by recognizing distinctions in use that are not clear at the level of everyday language and expressing them in an improved symbolic notation. In the logically perspicuous notation that Wittgenstein envisions as the endpoint of analysis, identity of use is represented by identity of sign.¹⁰ Each sign has exactly one use, and this use is shown, in each case, in the combinatorial rules that govern the sign’s possibilities of significant combination with other signs in the perspicuous notation. Wittgenstein calls the complete set of such rules “logical syntax” or “logical grammar”; their role in analysis is to exhibit the patterns of usage that are implicit in ordinary language, making them explicit as combinatorial rules for the significant appearance of signs. The logical notation not only renders philosophical confusions impossible, but exhibits the patterns of use that are the implicit foundation of ordinary-language meaning.

In thus describing the basis for the meaningfulness of signs in the possibilities of their significant use, Wittgenstein therefore provides a substantially new answer to the ancient question of the relationship of material or lexicographical signs to what we intuitively or pre-theoretically understand as their meanings or referents.¹¹ As it functions in the *Tractatus*, the new conception, and its role in philosophical criticism, depends both on the thought that meaning is intelligible only in reflection on use, and the further claim that use is itself explicable through a systematic clarification of the rules governing it. Thus, while the ordinary relationship between signs and “meanings” might have been specified, in an earlier age of philosophical thought, as consisting in the capacity of repeatable signs to evoke similar ideas or images in the minds of their speakers and hearers, Wittgenstein’s conception of the systematicity of language and the origination of possibilities of error inherent in its use led him to reject any such subjectivist picture and replace it with the direct critical inquiry into the uses of terms that he suggests here. Indeed, while philosophers at least since Locke had criticized our tendency to assume that identity of sign implies identity of meaning or reference, it is only through his conception of the systematicity of the rules of use for a language as a whole that Wittgenstein is able to transform this piecemeal and opportunistic criticism of use into a wholesale doctrine of the meaningfulness of language overall.¹²

Though he is not completely explicit about the scope and character of logical syntax, Wittgenstein proceeds to work out an instructive example of

how the elucidation of its rules can dissipate one important philosophical error, Russell's mistake of supposing it necessary to augment the logical theory of propositional signs with a theory of ordered types. A perspicuous notation that exposes the logical structure of language, Wittgenstein argues, will by itself show that there is no need for the theory of types; for it will show that Russell's paradox, to which it answered, cannot arise. Wittgenstein makes the point by considering how a case of the paradox might be symbolized:

3.333. The reason why a function cannot be its own argument is that the sign for a function already contains the prototype of its argument, and it cannot contain itself.

For let us suppose that the function $F(fx)$ could be its own argument: in that case there would be a proposition " $F(F(fx))$ ", in which the outer function F and the inner function F must have different meanings, since the inner one has the form $\Phi(fx)$ and the outer one has the form $\Psi(\Phi(fx))$. Only the letter " F " is common to the two functions, but the letter by itself signifies nothing.

This immediately becomes clear if instead of " $F(Fu)$ " we write " $(\exists\Phi): F(\Phi u) \cdot \Phi u = Fu$ ".

That disposes of Russell's paradox.

This argument against Russell's theory follows directly from the use-based theory of the meaningfulness of signs that we explored in the last section. It operates by showing that the attempt to express the paradox results in a series of signs which have not yet been given a tolerably clear sense. Our attempt to formulate the paradox necessarily uses the same sign two different ways; if we disambiguate them, giving each sign a univocal sense, the (appearance of) paradox dissolves. It is important to note that it is no part of Wittgenstein's argument to prohibit (conventionally or stipulatively) the embedding of a propositional sign within itself; the perspicuous notation simply shows, when we try to express such an embedding in it, that we cannot unambiguously do so. When we write $F(F(fx))$, the notation shows clearly that the two occurrences of F have different forms; they are being used in different ways and according to different rules. Once we see this, we see that there is nothing in common to the two occurrences except that they use the same letter. As often happens in ordinary language, we have used the same sign in two different ways; the difference is simply that the logical notation, unlike ordinary languages, immediately shows the difference in form through its expressive syntax. The thought that a proposition can make a statement about itself, the thought that led to Russell's paradox, is exposed as arising from a notational confusion: it is only because we use the same orthographic sign for what are in fact two different symbols that we are led to think the paradox possible. But once we see clearly that the symbol expressed by a sign is determined by its possibilities of significant use, we can also see that the attempt to state the paradox is doomed from the outset.

This criticism of Russell exemplifies the philosophical method that, Wittgenstein thought, could disarm philosophical and ordinary confusions by exposing their roots in our temptation to use the same orthographic sign in a variety of different ways. On the method, reflection about the various uses of an ordinary sign suggests its replacement with one or more distinct signs; ultimately, we develop a notation in which each sign is used in exactly one way. The form of this perspicuous symbolism then shows the logical rules that govern meaningful linguistic use. Wittgenstein insisted that these rules of logical syntax must treat only of signs themselves, and never involve reference to their meanings.¹³ In other words, there ought never, in the process of analysis, be any occasion to stipulate the possible uses of signs by referring to the meanings that we want them to have; Wittgenstein objected that Russell had done just this in his theory of types, and that this alone showed the invalidity of the theory.¹⁴ Instead, reflection on the uses that signs already have in ordinary language must suffice to develop all the distinctions expressed in the structure of the logically perspicuous symbolism. The introduction of a new sign can, accordingly, only be justified by the recognition of a previously unrecognized use; the new use will then naturally be codified in combinatorial, syntactical rules governing the possible appearances of the new sign. In this way, the logical analysis of language proceeds from ordinary observations about significant use to the notational expression of these observations, yielding clarity about the meanings of signs by exhibiting perspicuously their use.

III

Thus understood, Wittgenstein's theory of the meaningfulness of language suggests an ambitious program of meaning-analysis or clarification that would terminate in the elimination of all philosophical confusions by way of the elimination of all confusions about the use of signs. It may be clear enough how this kind of grammatical clarification can prevent philosophical errors in the straightforward examples of ambiguity that Wittgenstein gives ("Green is green" and the various uses of the words "is," "exist," and "identical"), but we might legitimately wonder how general Wittgenstein actually intended the program to be. How widely applicable is the method of clarifying the meaning of propositions by identifying and elucidating the uses of their simple signs? Clearly, the answer to this question depends on specifying just how we should understand the "use" of a sign, how we should identify which features of our actual employment of signs we should consider relevant to the philosophical practice of clarifying meaning.

My suggestion is that the program is completely general; for its foundation is not any specific theoretical conception of meaning, but rather the general theory of the meaningfulness of signs that we have already examined. The general theory of the meaningfulness of signs expresses what appeared to Wittgenstein at this time to be the relevance to the determination of

meaning of the systematic structure of a language as a whole. Commentators have, in fact, often underestimated the comprehensiveness and generality of the program of analysis that Wittgenstein suggests in the *Tractatus*. For insofar as they have discussed the concept of logical syntax at all, they have generally supposed that the rules of logical syntax, to be shown through the practice of meaning-analysis, are intended to be in some way limited or restricted with respect to the totality of rules of use that determine meanings in ordinary language. Anscombe, for instance, interprets the phrase “logico-syntactic employment” as meaning “the kind of difference between the syntactical roles of words which concerns a logician” rather than gesturing toward “role in life,’ ‘use’, [or] ‘practice of the use’ in the sense of *Philosophical Investigations*.”¹⁵ But actually there is no reason to think that Wittgenstein intended the scope of the rules of logical syntax shown by logical reflection on the use of symbolism in ordinary language to be any smaller than the total range of possible meanings in ordinary language. Wherever, in ordinary language, there are distinctions of meaning, there is presumably the possibility of a notation that shows those distinctions; if this is right, then logical clarification, in Wittgenstein’s sense, can proceed according to the clarificatory question “what does that mean?” regardless of the subject matter of the proposition or claim in question.

With the nature and scope of Wittgenstein’s Tractarian program of analysis thus clarified in its connection with his use-doctrine of meaning, we can begin to see that program not only as a much more direct antecedent of the *Philosophical Investigations*’ conception of grammar, but also of a variety of significant subsequent innovations in the history of analytic philosophy. First, the *Tractatus*’ use-doctrine of meaningfulness means that its project of analysis is already *holistic*. There is no way to clarify the meaning of a sign without clarifying its use; but the use of a sign is identified with all of its possibilities of significant appearance in propositions of the language. It follows that there is no complete analysis of the meaning of a sign that does not determine all of these possibilities. The clarification of the meaning of a sign must take into account all of the contexts in which it can appear significantly, and the combinatorial rules of logical syntax thereby revealed will govern, for each sign, the possibilities of its appearance in conjunction with each of the other potentially significant signs of the language. It follows that there is, in an important sense, no such thing as the analysis of a single term in isolation. The only way to give a complete analysis of any term is to give an analysis of the whole language. In this sense, the project of the *Tractatus* already expresses the claim, usually associated with the later Wittgenstein, that “understanding a sentence means understanding a language.”¹⁶ The holistic semantic dependence of one term upon all of the other terms in the language is bound to be implicit in ordinary discourse, but analysis makes it explicit in its progress toward a logically perspicuous notation.

Additionally, there is a second, deeper way in which the *Tractatus*’ program of analysis anticipates the commitments of much later, and even contemporary,

projects. Because it begins with ordinary judgments of the meaning of propositions, and proceeds from identifying the semantic relations of *propositions* to identifying their logically distinct terms by their uses, the program of the *Tractatus* embodies what might today be called an *inferentialist* program of analysis.¹⁷ Wittgenstein emphasizes, just before stating the use-doctrine of meaningfulness, that only propositions have sense; a name has meaning only in the nexus of a particular proposition.¹⁸ Judgments of meaning must begin as judgments of the meaning of propositions; it is only on the basis of the judgment that a proposition is meaningful—and has the meaning that it does—that we can begin to understand the meanings (uses) of its constituent symbols. To identify the logically simple parts of a proposition (parts that, of course, may not be shown perspicuously by the symbolism of ordinary language), we begin by considering a class of propositions, all of which have something in common that is essential to their sense.¹⁹ The class of propositions that have some component of their sense in common, then, share a "propositional variable"; by stipulating values for the variable, we can recover the original class of propositions.²⁰ If a sentence's significant terms are all replaced by propositional variables, its logical form is shown.²¹ In this way, beginning with logical relations of semantic similarity among propositions, the analysis works toward the segmentation of those propositions into their logically simple parts. There is no way to access these parts, however, other than by first comprehending the logical and inferential relationships among propositions as a whole. The logical or inferential relationships of sense among propositions themselves define their logically simple parts; so there is no alternative, in the analytic process of articulating a proposition into its logically simple parts, to beginning with its semantic relations to a large variety of other propositions.

IV

Wittgenstein's Tractarian conception of analysis therefore already involved, as we have seen, the determinative claim that the analyst's work consists in determining and symbolizing the specific rules that govern linguistic usage in a language as a whole. These rules are conceived as implicit, in any case, in ordinary patterns of usage, but the imperfections of our ordinary explicit understanding of them are to blame for a wide variety of errors and confusions. The possibility of linguistic or philosophical criticism depends on the gap between what we in fact do, on particular occasions of utterance, and what the actual rules of usage require of us; in particular, these rules establish identities of usage where we are tempted to use one and the same sign in more than one particular way. The assumption that language as a whole could be portrayed as a total corpus of rules determining distinct uses therefore governed, at this time, both Wittgenstein's conception of language and his sense of the work of philosophical criticism of it. But the underlying instabilities of this conception, which became apparent to Wittgenstein only

after his return to philosophy in 1929, would also demand a deep transformation in his conception of this work. For as Wittgenstein would come in stages to appreciate after 1929, the conception of a language as a systematic calculus involves an untenable conception of what is involved in its learning or understanding.

Wittgenstein's transitional works show clearly how the Tractarian picture of logical syntax began to cede to a more pluralistic and nuanced conception of the grammatical foundations of meaning. In the *Philosophical Remarks (PR)* composed in 1929 and 1930, Wittgenstein considered in detail the possibility of clarifying the grammatical structure of ordinary language owing to which it allows for various perceptual and experiential possibilities; he called this project "phenomenological."²² The *Remarks* explicitly retained the *Tractatus*'s conception of philosophical criticism as the critique of failures to give signs a univocal sense; but Wittgenstein was now less certain that the truth-functional notation that he had suggested in the *Tractatus* would be adequate to the clarificatory task.²³ Propositions concerning colors and quantities, for instance, proved recalcitrant to the symbolization in terms of simple propositions that the *Tractatus* had suggested. Nevertheless, Wittgenstein continued to think that "phenomenological" relationships such as the incompatibility between red and green must be expressible in a logically perspicuous symbolism that captures the grammatical form of our language, even though our ordinary language does not show this form explicitly:

77. How is it possible for $f(a)$ and $f(b)$ to contradict one another, as certainly seems to be the case? For instance, if I say "There is red here now" and "There is green here now"? . . .

78. If $f(r)$ and $f(g)$ contradict one another, it is because r and g completely occupy the f and cannot both be in it. But that doesn't show itself in our signs. But it must show itself if we look, not at the sign, but at the symbol. For since this includes the form of the objects, then the impossibility of " $f(r) \cdot f(g)$ " must show itself there, in this form.

It must be possible for the contradiction to show itself entirely in the symbolism, for if I say of a patch that it is red and green, it is certainly at most only one of these two, and the contradiction must be contained in the sense of the two propositions.

That two colours won't fit at the same time in the same place must be contained in their form and the form of space.

As in the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein distinguishes between sign and symbol; ordinary language fails to show the structure of exclusion that characterizes the sense of propositions about colors and that a perspicuous symbolism could reveal. But the fact that this structure is non-truth-functional—two of its simple propositions can be mutually contradictory without being negations of one another—led Wittgenstein to conclude that the connection

between the possibilities expressed in its symbolism and the possibilities for the combination of objects in the world must be more complicated than the *Tractatus* had held.

On the new conception, the correspondence that makes a proposition true is not simply a correspondence between that proposition and the world, but a correspondence between *the entire system of propositions in which it figures* and the world.²⁴ The propositions "the surface is red" and "the surface is green" are only contradictory because they designate different positions in the whole *system* of propositions expressing colors, and a perspicuous notation would have to express this whole system, capturing the exclusivity of different positions within it. The exclusive relationship between red and green is a feature of an entire articulated system; and it is the relationship between this whole system and the states of affairs in the world that makes any single proposition about color true. Translating into the language of the *Tractatus*, we can put this recognition as the discovery that recognizing the symbol in a sign, by means of a clarification of the use of terms in a proposition, requires the elucidation of the whole logical system in which that proposition figures. Accordingly, it becomes harder to imagine that such recognition could culminate in anything like a single, unique analysis of any sentence.

At about the same time, and partially as a result of the discovery of the non-truth-functional nature of certain kinds of logical form, Wittgenstein began also to reconsider the central question of the relationship of the use of a sign to its meaning. In thinking about what is involved in using a sign meaningfully, we can easily be tempted, Wittgenstein now thought, by a kind of "mythology," a notion that the meaning of the sign is itself a kind of shadowy, mysterious accompaniment to it, for instance a mental process or state that endows the otherwise inert and meaningless sign with a sense.²⁵ In his exposition of this line of critique in the *Philosophical Remarks*, Wittgenstein's direct target is primarily Russell's theory of judgment, according to which the correctness of a judgment consists not only in the relationship between the judgment and a fact, but also in a subjective experience of correctness.²⁶ The theory was objectionable in that, in addition to describing the "internal" logical relationship between a judgment and the fact it adduces, it introduces also a third event which, even if it existed, could only be "externally" related to this logical relationship and so must be completely irrelevant to its description.²⁷

The temptation to introduce such intermediaries, Wittgenstein says here, has its root in a "danger of giving a mythology of the symbolism, or of psychology: instead of simply saying what everyone knows and must admit."²⁸ The mythology threatens, for instance, when we explain "how a picture is meant" in terms of the psychological reaction it tends to elicit, or the state of mind that is supposed to accompany my meaning or intending it a certain way. We avoid the mythology only by recognizing that, as Wittgenstein puts it, "the intention is already expressed in the way I *now* compare the

picture with reality” and not in any other item, inner or outer, mental or physical, thought to accompany this present application.²⁹

Even if we recognize that clarification of the meaning of a sign means clarification of its significant uses, we can be tempted, under the influence of this mythology, to think that the “use” is something somehow present, all at once, alongside or behind each significant employment of the sign. Wittgenstein’s increasingly explicit criticism of the confusion implicit in such accounts, in line with the critique of psychologism that Frege had first developed, culminates in the diagnosis of their central assumption that he offers in the *Blue Book*:

The mistake we are liable to make could be expressed thus: We are looking for the use of a sign, but we look for it as though it were an object *co-existing* with the sign. (One of the reasons for this mistake is again that we are looking for a “thing corresponding to a substantive.”)³⁰

Wittgenstein thus recognized the Russellian theory as an objectionable instance of psychologism and opposed it, as he had opposed psychologism more generally in the *Tractatus*, by way of an immanent reflection on the use or application of pictures, in this case to judgments of truth or falsity. But as the subsequent development of his thought would make even clearer, Wittgenstein had already begun to see at least the rudiments of the mythology of meaning as having existed, also, in the *Tractatus*’ conception of use itself. For although the *Tractatus* had steadfastly avoided psychologism by refusing to describe the psychological or mental accompaniments of the regular use of a sign, its conception of the meaningfulness of signs, as we have seen, nevertheless pictures their application in practice as a matter of adherence to systematic rules of use, intelligible in their totality to philosophical elucidation and description.

Were one to give a psychological description of the actual practice of using a language, in accordance with this conception, one could only portray it as a matter of our grasping or understanding rules of use on some conscious or unconscious level. The rules, or their symbolic expressions, would then, again, amount to additional items thought to be present “behind” one’s current use and adduced to explain it; and this is just the mythology of symbolism that Wittgenstein now opposed. It is true, of course, that the *Tractatus*, in order to avoid psychologism, avoided giving any such description of the psychology of grasping or understanding rules; but its conception of correct language use as determined by rules presupposes that the correctness or incorrectness of a linguistic performance, on a particular occasion, depends on its adherence or failure to adhere to such rules nonetheless. As such, this conception repeats the mythology of meaning that Wittgenstein now criticized in Russell. It accounts for the meaningfulness of signs in the practice of a language only by introducing a conception of this practice that repeats, rather than answering, the underlying question that it purports to address.

The critique of psychologism that Wittgenstein inherited from Frege began by attacking theories that explain the possibility of meaning or understanding a term by reference to the presence of a mental object or item accompanying it. But in this more extended application, Wittgenstein brought the critique to bear as well against theories that, like his own earlier one, explain this possibility as a matter of the presence of a systematic corpus of rules intelligible to philosophical analysis. Against such theories, Wittgenstein continues to recommend that we look for the *use* of terms, but warns us against seeing this use as consisting in anything like an item, object, or structure potentially present to mind. In the *Investigations*, in the course of a complicated reflection on what is involved in our determination, in actual cases, that a student or an interlocutor has “gone on” to use a word in the right way, that she has “grasped” its sense, Wittgenstein considers specifically the picture that holds that such grasping consists in bringing to mind the entirety of the use of a word:

“It is as if we could grasp the whole use of the word in a flash.” Like *what* e.g.?—Can’t the use—in a certain sense—be grasped in a flash? And in what sense can it not?—The point is, that it is as if we could “grasp it in a flash” in yet another and much more direct sense than that.—But have you a model for this? No. It is just that this expression suggests itself to us. As the result of the crossing of different pictures.³¹

The objection that Wittgenstein formulates here plays a central role in the detailed considerations of rule-following and private language that form the two main critical movements of the *Investigations*. For the roots of the various mythologies that he criticizes, in both cases, can be found in the attempt to explain the meaningfulness of a language’s terms by reference to rules thought to be grasped or present to mind in the regular practice of a language. This attempt itself has its root in the mistake that he criticizes in the *Blue Book*, namely the tendency to look for the use of a sign as an “object co-existing” with it that explains its being used the way that it is.³²

As we have seen, the *Tractatus*’ conception of the practice of logical analysis envisioned the logical identification and adumbration of the distinct uses of signs as leading to a clarified notation that would prevent philosophical confusion. With this conception of a clarified notation that coordinates each sign to exactly one use, the project depended crucially on the possibility of an overall determination and segmentation of the varied application of signs in an ordinary language into distinct and describable uses; each of these was pictured, in particular, as governed by the determinate rules of the “logical syntax” that the practice of analysis sought to display. But as Wittgenstein had come to appreciate already in the transitional texts, the diversity and heterogeneity of ordinary contexts of use makes it implausible that any such (simple and unified) rules actually exist and can be described.³³

Going even further, indeed, the “rule-following” considerations of the *Philosophical Investigations*, especially through their articulation of the “paradox” of *PI* 201, raised the decisive critical question of what application such rules could have, even if they could be described. The *Tractatus*’ conception of analysis, as we have seen, relied for its force in application to the criticism of ordinary language on the possibility of distinguishing between performances judged correct, with respect to the rules of “logical syntax,” and those that, in misusing terms or confusing distinct uses, violated them. The distinction was supposed to be underwritten by the theorist’s ability to discern, within the heterogeneity of ordinary usage, the right or correct rules of syntax for a language; but the *Tractatus*’ conception of meaningfulness already gave the theorist no resource for determining these rules beyond what is involved in this ordinary use itself. As Wittgenstein would come to see later, this rendered any description of the rules of logical syntax essentially arbitrary with respect to the ordinary use it was supposed to explain. Some rough schematization of regularities or normal patterns “implicit” in ordinary usage might still be possible; but the force of the rule-following paradox of *PI* 201 was to show that any such schematization would itself remain open to the question of its own normative or critical application to individual linguistic performances, and so would fail to capture the (unique) rules underlying meaningfulness in the language as a whole.

Although he would continue to insist that the clarification of meaning depends on reflection on usage, the paradoxical gap Wittgenstein now saw as existing between the signs of a language and their application therefore meant that this reflection could no longer be supported by what he now recognized as a mythology of silent, determinate rules underlying ordinary linguistic performance. In connection with other, parallel results of the analytic tradition, as we shall see over the next several chapters, Wittgenstein’s identification and diagnosis of this mythology indeed marks one of the most significant lasting critical results of the tradition’s inquiry into the form and structure of the language that we speak and the problems of our ordinary access to it. It opens the space of a critical reflection on the varied and complicated implications of this access for the form of a linguistic life and the possibilities of meaning it permits.

Part II

**Radical translation and
intersubjective practice**

Introductory

From syntax to semantics (and pragmatics)

The scientific world-conception serves life, and life receives it.¹

(The Vienna Circle Manifesto)

In the last two chapters, we have seen how the analytical projects of Frege and the early Wittgenstein already demonstrated some of the revolutionary implications of a determinative theoretical recourse to the structure of language in relation to its everyday practice. Although this recourse did not figure explicitly in Frege's project of logical clarification, it was nevertheless, as we have seen, already strongly suggested by his application of the context principle to criticize psychologism. In Wittgenstein's explicit formulation of a use-theory of meaningfulness in the *Tractatus*, this critical application became the basis of a methodologically radical reflection on the significance of the structure of signs in the ordinary and everyday contexts of their use. Both projects, indeed, insofar as they raised the question of the relationship of signs to their ordinary, intersubjective use, also suggested, at least implicitly, the pervasive and determinative instabilities of a structuralist picture of language in relation to the life of practice it aims to capture. Although it would take a long time yet for these implications to come clearly to light, the projects that immediately followed in the course of the developing tradition of analysis would nevertheless confirm them even as they redefined and broadened the practice of logical or conceptual "analysis" itself.

The first, and most methodologically significant, application of Wittgenstein's program of logical syntax was, as we have seen, the Vienna Circle's project of analysis. Carnap, Schlick, and other logical empiricists applied the methods of structural analysis to produce a wide-ranging critical and reformative project, conceived by at least some of its adherents as having radical and utopian social consequences as well.² Especially in its pejorative application against "metaphysics," the project involved, as recent scholarship has demonstrated, significant and central misunderstandings of Wittgenstein's original project.³ Nevertheless it demonstrated the relevance of the specific methods of logical analysis to broader questions of philosophy of science, politics, and culture, and consolidated the legacy of these methods

for the logically based styles of philosophical analysis and reflection that became more and more popular, especially in the USA and Britain, following World War II.

Around the same time, the continuation, by philosophers associated more or less directly with the Circle's central project, of Frege's original attempt to display the logical foundations of mathematics, produced a set of radical results, mostly of a negative character, that demonstrated in a fundamental way the inherent instabilities involved in the attempt to analyze their structure. Kurt Gödel's 1931 "On Formally Undecidable Propositions of *Principia Mathematica*" reported what would become the best known and most historically decisive of these results, the two famous "incompleteness" theorems showing that any consistent axiomatic system powerful enough to describe the arithmetic of the natural numbers will formulate truths that cannot be proven within that system. The result was widely perceived as demonstrating the failure of the logicist program of reducing mathematics to logic that had been begun by Frege and continued by Russell and Hilbert. It turned on the possibility of constructing, in any sufficiently strong system, a sentence asserting its own unprovability within that system. The resulting sentence is true but, since it is true, cannot be proven. In reaching the result Gödel used the metalogical technique of "arithmetization" to represent the syntax of a formal system, including the notions of proof and consequence, within that system itself. Working independently with a similar metalogical technique, Alfred Tarski showed in 1933 the *indefinability* of arithmetical truth within a formal system of arithmetic.⁴ That is, he showed that it is impossible, in any system strong enough to capture the axioms and results of arithmetic, to define within it a formula which holds of all and only the sentences within it that are true (on its standard interpretation). The result, like Gödel's, again turned upon the possibility of constructing a "self-referential" sentence, in this case one saying of itself (given any putative truth predicate) that it is not true; to demonstrate this possibility of construction, Tarski depended, as Gödel had, on arithmetization to represent the formal syntax of a language within the language itself.⁵ Both results undermined intuitively plausible assumptions about the ability of formal systems to capture the basis of ordinary judgments about the truth of mathematical propositions.

The results of Gödel and Tarski were to have a deep and determinative influence on the methodological assumptions of philosophers within the analytic tradition. Most decisive were their effects on the program, of which Frege, Russell, Carnap, Schlick, Wittgenstein and Hilbert had all been partisans, of seeking to clarify the logical structure of a language or a specialized portion thereof (for instance the language of arithmetic) purely through a *syntactic* description of its structure. In a later paper, published in 1944, Tarski presented his own earlier result as demanding that the purely syntactic description of language structures be supplemented with what he called "semantic" concepts of truth and designation. Semantics, he said,

is a discipline which, speaking loosely, *deals with certain relations between expressions of a language and the objects* (or “states of affairs”) “referred to” by those expressions. As typical examples of semantic concepts we may mention the concepts of *designation, satisfaction, and definition* as these occur in the following examples:

the expression “the father of his country” designates (denotes) George Washington;

snow satisfies the sentential function (the condition) “x is white”;

*the equation “ $2 \cdot x = 1$ ” defines (uniquely determines) the number $1/2$.*⁶

Because it is impossible, as was shown by Tarski’s own earlier result, to give a consistent purely syntactical definition of truth for a language within that language itself, the theorist who wishes to give an account of truth must avail himself also of the semantic or “referential” relationships between the language’s terms and the objects they stand for. The distinction Tarski suggested between syntax and semantics was later to play a definitive role in the foundations of (what would come to be called) model theory. Even more broadly, it expressed the necessity, for a wide range of philosophers who followed, of supplementing the purely syntactical analysis of a language with a “world-directed” semantical analysis of the referential character of its terms and formulas.⁷

In addition to the dual analysis of language in terms of rules of syntax and rules of semantics, practitioners of analytic reflection on language would soon have a third, explicitly formulated category of sign behavior with which to reckon as well. This was the category of “pragmatics” suggested by Charles Morris in 1938.⁸ Drawing on pragmatist philosophers such as James, Mead, Dewey and (especially) Pierce, Morris suggested that, in addition to the syntactic theory of the relations to signs to one another, and the semantic theory of their relations to their *designata*, pragmatics be added as a third explicit component of semiosis, or the total theory of sign function. Pragmatics could then be defined thus:

By “pragmatics” is designated the science of the relation of signs to their interpreters . . . Since most, if not all, signs have as their interpreters living organisms, it is a sufficiently accurate characterization of pragmatics to say that it deals with the biotic aspects of semiosis, that is, with all the psychological, biological, and sociological phenomena which occur in the functioning of signs.⁹

With explicit reference to Carnap’s “logical syntax” project and to the definition of semantics with which, it now seemed, it had to be supplemented, Morris held that the three dimensions of sign analysis could, jointly, comprise the basis for a complete program of logical analysis.¹⁰ With the clear separation of the three dimensions of semiosis, and the analysis of the “rules of usage” of given sign vehicles in each of them, the potential objectivity of

any sign, and so its utility for scientific description, could be verified. Indeed, with the intersubjective standardization of usage, such objectivity could indeed actually be achieved. Even more generally, through this description of rules, the three-dimensional analysis could clarify, without residue, all the questions and problems that adhere to the ordinary concept of “meaning,” showing the uselessness of this concept for logical analysis and the possibility of dropping it from scientific discussion.

These innovations of semantics and pragmatics clearly represent a widening and diversifying of the original, purely syntactical project that had defined the conception of analysis most broadly shared at the beginning of the period of logical positivism. In relation to this original project, they expressed the necessity of a broader set of theoretical categories to capture the referential and intersubjective complexities of sign functioning. Nevertheless, the difficulties and considerations that led to the supplementation of syntax with semantics and pragmatics did not cause any abandonment of the basic structuralist picture of language as a regular totality of signs wholly governed by rules of use. Indeed, as is clear in Morris’ text, the possibility of including the other, non-syntactic sign dimensions in this structuralist picture was even seen as strengthening it. On Morris’ conception, the rules of usage might have to comprise not only syntactical rules of formation and intercombination for signs and sign sequences and semantical rules connecting particular signs to their objects, but also pragmatic rules specifying the tendencies of language-users to employ, or expect the employment of, particular signs on particular occasions. But since all of these rules were “rules of usage” in the relevant sense, and all of them (or so Morris assumed) could be completely and exhaustively described within an analysis of a language as a whole, the introduction of the category of pragmatics provided no essential difficulty to this project of analysis or the utility of its results. The structuralist picture of language that had originally been the basis of Carnap’s “syntax” project thus continued to characterize the aims and ambitions of analysis, even when the dimensions of semantics and pragmatics were explicitly brought in as well. The results and tensions that could have demonstrated an inherent and general instability within the structuralist project of analysis were instead taken only to demand, within it, an expansion of the categories of analysis to include the other dimensions of sign functioning that had been ignored by the purely syntactic conception.

Thus, with the conclusion of the project of logical positivism, structuralism remained entrenched as an underlying theory of language; the results that could have led to a more general recognition of its underlying instabilities and inherent tensions were interpreted, instead, simply as requiring an expansion of its terms and categories of analysis. But the question of the relationships between the syntactical and semantical clarification of language and the “pragmatic” dimension of the structure and effects of its use would soon become deeply relevant to quite another development of the

methods of philosophical reflection on language. In 1955, John Langshaw Austin, then White's Professor of Moral Philosophy at Oxford, delivered at Harvard the William James Lectures that were later collected as *How to Do Things With Words*. The lectures expressed ideas that had occurred to Austin as early as 1939, and had also formed the basis for lecture courses and discussions at Oxford in the 1940s and early 1950s.¹¹ In the lectures, Austin set out, first of all, to criticize what he saw as a longstanding over-emphasis, in philosophical discussions of language, on the work of "statements" in "stating" or "describing" facts truly or falsely. The recent trend of submitting language to a new level of scrutiny, Austin said, had indeed clarified the fact that, in many cases, what appear to be propositions with sense are in fact either nonsensical or mean something quite different than they at first appeared to.¹² Austin followed Schlick and Carnap in proclaiming the new scrutiny a "revolution in philosophy";¹³ but its further development, Austin suggested, would depend on the recognition of a type of utterance that the new criticism of language had not, as yet, considered. As distinct from "constative" utterances whose work is to describe or otherwise state (and so can be evaluated as true or false), *performative* utterances can be defined, according to Austin, as those that, though they do not "describe" or "report", nevertheless are such that their utterance "is, or is part of, the doing of an action, which again would not *normally* be described as, or as 'just', saying something."¹⁴ As homespun examples, Austin offers the utterance of a vow in the course of a marriage ceremony, the naming of a ship while smashing a bottle on its bow, the bequest of an item in a will, or the placement of a bet. None of these utterances are true or false; yet they accomplish their work, the performance of some action, when uttered in the right circumstances and along with the right (normally conventional or traditional) accompaniments.

The question of the status of these circumstances and accompaniments emerges, in the subsequent analysis, as a particularly important and decisive one for the possibility of the general theory of performatives that Austin attempts to develop. For a performative utterance to succeed in accomplishing its ordinary effect, Austin argues, at least two kinds of conditions must normally be satisfied. First, there must be an "accepted conventional procedure," for instance the marriage ceremony, and it must in fact be completely carried out in the right way and in appropriate circumstances by the right people; second, there are conditions concerning the feelings, intentions, and subsequent actions of the actors, including at least in some cases that they must "in fact have those thoughts and feelings" that the ordinary procedure demands.¹⁵ Austin devotes the next several lectures to the analysis of these two sets of conditions for the success or "felicity" of performatives. In connection with the second set of conditions in particular, Austin recognizes that the infelicities that can affect the utterances most obviously deserving the status of performatives can also, equally, preclude the success of some constatives, in particular those expressing belief. Here,

as Austin admits, the original distinction between constatives and performatives threatens to break down.¹⁶ As becomes evident upon further analysis, and as Austin himself argues, there is, indeed, no purely *grammatical* or structural criterion sufficient to distinguish performatives from constatives in all cases.¹⁷ The underlying idea, of course, is that uttering a performative is *doing* something, whereas uttering a constative is not (or is, only insofar as what is done is that something is said). We may try, Austin suggests, to mark this difference by noticing the primacy of the first person singular present indicative in the ordinary utterance of performatives. We might offer it as a criterion, for instance, that all genuine performatives can be put into this form.¹⁸ But this does not, as Austin says, settle the question. For many non-performatives can also be put into this form, and there are in-between cases as well. In describing the difference between performatives and constatives, we may be tempted to say that in the case of performatives, the person issuing the utterances (and so performing the action) is referred to in a special way, either explicitly in the first person, or, when this does not take place, by being the person who does the uttering or (in the case of writing) by appending a signature.¹⁹ But again, these criteria fail to distinguish performatives, since they may hold in the case of constatives as well.

The results of Austin's analysis lead him to despair of finding a general, structurally motivated distinction between performatives and constatives in language as a whole; instead, he suggests that we undertake the analysis of the "speech act" as a "total speech situation" without prejudice to the question of its performative or constative character.²⁰ In particular, within the analysis of such situations, "stating" and "describing" are to be seen simply as the names of two particular types of acts, with no essential priority in the large and diverse set of illocutionary accomplishments of which ordinary language is capable. The determination of the truth or falsity of sentences is, then, to be treated simply as one dimension, among many others, of their evaluation in terms of satisfactoriness, and the long-standing distinction between the "factual" and "normative" or "evaluative" thereby undermined in the course of a more comprehensive analysis of language and its effects.²¹

The "speech act theory" that Austin inaugurated has enjoyed a long and influential career, both within and without the analytic tradition itself. John Searle's influential development and schematization of Austin's original distinctions represents perhaps the most direct continuance of the theoretical project of analysis that Austin had suggested; in a somewhat different direction, Paul Grice has developed Austin's inspiration into a wide-ranging theoretical analysis of "speaker meaning" in terms of the intentions and maxims that are operative in determining and constraining ordinary communication. Some of the subsequent developments of speech act theory, and some contemporary contributions to the analysis of linguistic phenomena such as indexicality, continue to assume, following Morris' gesture, a distinction of the pragmatic dimension of "speaker meaning" from the semantical

and syntactical analysis of the meaning of sentences and words. But in relation to the analytic tradition's longstanding project of structuralist analysis and reflection on the systematic structure of language, the most enduring and methodologically significant contribution of Austin's analysis is not simply his development of the third, "pragmatic" dimension of language that Morris had already suggested. It is, rather, his demonstration of the essential inseparability of the pragmatic dimension from the other two, and hence of the insuperable entanglement of any philosophical account of the basis of meaning with the problems of the pragmatic application of signs.²²

Within the subsequent development of structuralist methods of analysis and reflection on language, the main effect of Austin's work was, most of all, to make explicit what had long been implicit in discussions of the "rules of usage" governing a language: namely that such rules, if they exist at all, must be conceived as constraining or systematizing the ordinary, intersubjective *behavior and action* of individuals in a community. From this point on, and with very few exceptions, the tradition's main projects devoted to the analysis and clarification of language and its structure all centrally involved reflection on the significance of *public* linguistic action and its relevance to the determination of meaning. After Austin, these projects almost universally took it for granted that the structure of meaning in a language is intelligible, if at all, in the regularities evident in the linguistic usage of terms and sentences across a variety of circumstances, and controlled by judgments or standards of what is "regular," "normal," or "ordinary" within a larger speech community.

Thus the structuralist picture of language, which had begun its philosophical career as the theoretical correlate of the early project of a purely logical or syntactic analysis, explicitly became the expression of a much broader and more varied project of analytical and structural reflection on the relationship of language to the ordinary life of its users. "Reductionist" or "foundationalist" attempts to analyze empirical language into the elementary constituents or sense-data that were earlier supposed to provide ultimate basis were replaced by "naturalist" and holist projects that assumed no such foundation, instead tracing the meaning of empirical propositions to their public and intersubjectively observable conditions of verification or demonstration. Meanwhile, in the nascent field of "philosophy of mind," the earlier analyses that had still accorded the subjective experience of an individual a basic and pre-linguistic status as an *explanandum* ceded to discussions of the use, in essentially public and intersubjective contexts, of the various terms and expressions of mental life. In many cases, the assumption underlying the shift was that those earlier analyses, tracing the phenomena of mental life to the closed interiority of the subject, had ignored or misplaced the significance of language to the question of their status.²³ The confusion was to be corrected through insistence on the essential role of language in articulating our access to the concepts and terms involved, and of language itself as essentially "public."

The new forms of analysis and analytic reflection, recognizing the indispensability of reflection on the use of terms and locutions in public, intersubjective contexts, were, however, bound to encounter essential questions and constitutive uncertainties in just the places that the difficulties of Austin's original analysis already suggested they might lie. If, for instance, linguistic meaning is to be understood as a matter of the usage of terms or sentences across diverse contexts, then the question of the basis of the regularity of this usage is bound to come to the fore. Reference to the influence of a "community" or a set of conventionally established procedures or practices in determining or regulating usage does not solve the problem, but instead raises the additional questions of the nature and institution of such communal standards and the basis of their force in constraining or criticizing individual performances. Emphasis on the essential "publicity" or "intersubjectivity" of linguistic acts tends to make the agency of the individual, what Austin in fact found essential to any possibility of distinguishing performatives from constatives, look mysterious; perhaps more significantly (as we shall see in the next chapter), it poses deep *prima facie* problems for the analysis of the form and structure of reports of first-person, subjective experience. Finally, and most decisively for the ultimate fate of the specific project with which Austin most directly associated himself, the conception of linguistic meaning as grounded in regular and structurally interconnected patterns of "ordinary" usage makes the elucidation of meaning dependent on the systematic elucidation of these patterns, as they operate within, and define, a language as a whole. The epistemological and methodological problems of the theoretician's access to this usage, and his claim to distinguish between the "ordinary" uses of language and its non-ordinary (typically "metaphysical" or "philosophical") extensions, would prove determinative in the reception, development, and eventual widespread repudiation of the philosophical practices that now came to represent the main stream of analytic philosophy.

The school of "ordinary language philosophy" that Austin and Ryle represented, and that flourished at Oxford after World War II, was initially influenced to a larger degree by Moore and the early Wittgenstein rather than by the Vienna Circle. Nevertheless, like the philosophers of the Circle, its foremost proponents took it that reflection on the systematic interrelationships of terms and propositions, and the regularities of their use in various contexts, could provide the basis for a radical critique of the illusions and unclarity to which we can regularly (and especially when doing philosophy) be prone. One chief form of these errors was the tendency of language to appear to refer to pseudo-objects or fictitious entities which, upon analysis, could be seen to be eliminable within a clarified account of linguistic reference. As early as 1932, in the influential article "Systematically Misleading Expressions," Ryle had argued for the utility of such an analysis of the reference of ordinary terms and phrases in demonstrating their misleading referential pretensions.²⁴ Such analysis involved, as it had for Frege and Russell, demonstrating the real logical form of the terms and

locutions in question, over against the tendency of ordinary language to obscure them. It therefore required the determination and specification of the logical or (as Ryle was inclined to put it) *categorical* structure of terms in a language as a whole. The errors and confusions to which philosophical analysis most directly responds, Ryle argued in the 1938 article “Categories,” could uniformly be presented as categorical confusions, failures to understand or distinguish the categories or logical types to which, within the structure of a language as a whole, certain terms belong.²⁵ Such analysis, Ryle followed Frege and Wittgenstein in holding, would trace the structure of terms in a language by reflecting on the inferential relations among propositions as a whole, for, as Ryle put it, the logical types into which terms in a language must be sorted “control and are controlled by the logical form of the propositions into which they can enter.”²⁶ In accordance with this recognition, Ryle argued, logical analysis of propositions to show their categorical structure—to identify and analyze the simple concepts that comprise them—must begin with the identification of logical relationships of identity and difference of sense among *whole* propositions:

It has long been known that what a proposition implies, it implies in virtue of its form. The same is true of what it is compatible and incompatible with. Let us give the label “liaisons” to all the logical relations of a propositions, namely what it implies, what it is implied by, what it is compatible with and what it is incompatible with. Now, any respect in which two propositions differ in form will be reflected in differences in their liaisons . . . Indeed the liaisons of a proposition do not merely *reflect* the formal properties of the proposition and, what this involves, those of all of its factors. In a certain sense, they are the same thing.²⁷

Like Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus*, Ryle thus held that a proposition’s logical relations with other propositions determine its logical form; and it is only by determining these relations that its simple terms can be isolated. Ryle followed Wittgenstein, as well, in identifying the simple terms thereby shown with symbols defined by their logical possibilities of significant *use* in propositions. The resulting segmentation of propositions into their constituent concepts would yield a categorical grammar for the language, a structure or system of categories whose possibilities of significant combination are the direct image of the logical relations of significant propositions.

The doctrine of categories expounded in the 1938 article provides the setting for the notion of “category mistakes” that would become Ryle’s most pervasive critical tool in the widely influential reflection on the logical structure of the ordinary language of “mental life” that he undertook in *The Concept of Mind*. Such mistakes, he held there, stem from the failure of users of language to appreciate the systematic categorical structure of the terms they use. As a result, they tend to formulate propositions which are in

fact absurdities, although they may not seem to be so at first glance. The analyst's work, in criticizing the absurdities inherent in traditional philosophical theories, consists in elucidating the actual categorical structure inherent in ordinary usage in order to show the particular ways in which the traditional philosopher abuses it. Here, Ryle takes the theory of mind tracing to Descartes, in particular, as a target of philosophical criticism. It is to be shown to consist in a single overarching category mistake subsuming a wide variety of smaller, more specific ones. The analysis and treatment of these individual mistakes sets the agenda for the specific analyses of the concepts of intelligence, thinking, perception, and intention that Ryle undertakes.²⁸

For Ryle as well as for Austin, therefore, the possibility of directing reflection on language against the errors of traditional philosophical theories depended on the theorist's ability to elucidate the actual logical structure of the ordinary use of terms within a language as a whole. This ambition to characterize the actual logical structure of use was the basis of Ryle's attempt at "rectifying the logical geography" of our concepts as well as Austin's unsuccessful attempt to systematize the distinction between performative and constative. In both cases, even if a total, or completed, description of the overall structure of language was not in view, philosophical insight was seen as relying on the partial application of reflection on distinctions and implications of ordinary usage to specially problematic areas. The standard for such reflection was the patterns of regularity and difference of usage implicit in the speech of language users, as these could emerge upon a bit of systematic reflection.

In the 1953 article "Ordinary Language," Ryle sought to explain the program and defend it against misinterpretation by defining its key concepts and characteristic methods.²⁹ Philosophically relevant reflection on "the ordinary use" of various expressions does not, Ryle clarifies, restrict itself to "ordinary" or "vernacular" terms or demand the drawing of any adventitious line between terms in use in "everyday" contexts and those employed only in special theoretical or technical ones. Nor is the philosopher's attention to the *use* of an expression correctly directed toward what Ryle calls a "usage"—namely a "custom, practice, fashion or vogue" of using it. Whereas to know how to use a term is always, for Ryle, to know *how* to do something, "knowing" a usage in this sense does not amount to such a knowing-how. For it makes sense to suppose that a term may be, in some context, *misused*, but "there cannot be a misuse any more than there can be a miscustom or a misvogue." What the philosopher who attends to the uses of words takes interest in is not, therefore, the description of customs or practices of using them, but rather the distinction between what Ryle calls their "stock" or "standard" and "non-stock" or "non-standard" uses. He seeks to elucidate, in other words, in any particular case, *what* a term is doing when it does what it *ordinarily* does, what it accomplishes when it accomplishing the job it normally accomplishes. What is elucidated in such an elucidation, according to Ryle, is what earlier philosophers grasped as

the nature of “ideas,” “concepts,” or “meanings”; we can understand it, in a more contemporary idiom, as capturing the “rules of logic” as well:

Learning to use expressions, like learning to use coins, stamps, cheques and hockey-sticks, involves learning to do certain things with them and not others; when to do certain things with them, and when not to do them. Among the things that we learn in the process of learning to use linguistic expressions are what we may vaguely call “rules of logic”; for example, that though Mother and Father can both be tall, they cannot both be taller than one another; or that though uncles can be rich or poor, fat or thin, they cannot be male or female, but only male.³⁰

For a brief time immediately after World War II, the methods of “Oxford language analysis” enjoyed great popularity. During this period, as the methods of analytic philosophy developed most centrally by the Vienna Circle and its associates were being transmitted to other scenes and supplanted by their methodological descendants, the Oxford style of analysis was even routinely treated as capturing the claims of linguistic analysis *tout court*. For many of those who were just beginning to realize the philosophical implications of the reflection on language that Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle had begun, the claims and practices of the Oxford analysts seemed to capture, especially well, the possibility of using such reflection to criticize traditional sources of philosophical error without, nevertheless, leading to (what was now being recognized as) the newer error of verificationism. But the vogue of ordinary language philosophy was brief. It was soon to become the subject of widespread doubts as well as brutal and almost wholly unjustified attacks on its basic methods and practices of philosophical clarification and analysis; these led, by the 1960s and 1970s, to its general repudiation and replacement by other projects, in particular the methods of formal analysis and interpretation more directly associated with Quine and Davidson.

One of the most direct, if unfortunate, reasons for this repudiation was the attack launched by Ernest Gellner in his celebrated book *Words and Things* in 1959; the book, which was notably introduced by Russell, accused ordinary language philosophy and the whole methodology of linguistic analysis of an empty and essentially “conservative” project that substituted the “cult of common sense” (p. 32) for genuine insight into reality and thus blocked or precluded any possible of criticizing socially entrenched practices or norms.³¹ The book became the cause of a notorious and public scandal when Ryle refused to allow a review of it to appear in *Mind* and Russell protested the refusal in *The Times*. The resulting exchange ran for several weeks and consolidated, in the popular imagination, the image of a bitter debate over the proper methods and results of philosophical analysis. As was recognized by most of the philosophers who weighed in on the debate, though, Gellner’s image of the practices of ordinary language philosophy had been, from the beginning, a caricature. His arguments against such

supposed bases of ordinary language philosophy as the “paradigm case argument” and the “contrast theory of meaning” did not, in fact, address any recognizable component of the methods that Austin, Ryle, and Wisdom had in fact articulated and defended.³² But rather than producing a broader, more critical discussion of its methods and the implications of their recourse to language, Gellner’s attack led, for the most part, to the still-current tendency to discuss ordinary language philosophy as a bygone or superseded method, without gaining any clear understanding of why it is so or what makes the methods that replaced it any better.

More generally, the practice of ordinary language philosophy still represents one of the most detailed and methodologically articulated expressions of the reflective and critical implications of our knowledge of language for the traditional problems of philosophy. As such, it expresses in a determinate and methodologically sophisticated way the significance of this knowledge of language for the form of a human life, or of its clarification for the solution or resolution of its problems. There is a tendency, evident in Gellner’s attack and still unfortunately widespread, to take the inherent instabilities of our access to language to show the irrelevance of linguistic reflection to the problems of a philosophical inquiry. This tendency is, no doubt, partially responsible for the dissimulation or refusal of language as a specific source of philosophical insight, in many of the current projects that nevertheless still persist in practicing modes of analysis or reflection first determined by the problems of our ordinary access to language. But it need not be taken to demand the wholesale refusal of the methods of ordinary language philosophy that are in fact responsible for some of the analytic tradition’s deepest and most penetrating insights into language, use, and our relationship to the words we speak. Recovered within a broader critical consideration, these methods could contribute substantially to a sharpening of these insights, and a consolidation of their significance for the future of philosophical inquiry.

4 Ryle and Sellars on inner-state reports

As we saw in Chapter 3, Wittgenstein's use-based theory of meaningfulness in the *Tractatus* already conceived of the sense of propositions as defined by the regular possibilities of their significant use, including their inferential relations with other propositions in a language as a whole. Over the decades following the publication of the *Tractatus*, developments of this holist, inferentialist program of analysis would come to exert an ever broader and more widespread influence over the methods of analytic philosophers. It would play a central methodological role, indeed, in the single development most characteristic of mid-century analytic philosophy. This was the radical critique undertaken by Austin, Ryle, and Sellars of the various subjectivist, empiricist, or Cartesian theories of mind that had placed the "givenness" of private sense-data or other immediate contents of consciousness at the center of their accounts of knowledge and understanding. Against these earlier theories, the mid-century philosophers emphasized the essential linguistic articulation of even the most basic *perceptual* concepts and judgments.¹ Such judgments, they emphasized, are applied, first and foremost, to the description of objective facts, phenomena, and events, and only secondarily to the "private" phenomena of first-person experience.

In this chapter, I shall explore the historical and methodological implications of this appeal to the "publicity" of linguistic use over against traditional theories of the privacy of experience. When Ryle wrote *The Concept of Mind* in 1949, his goal was to employ reflection on the "logical geography" of the ordinary concepts of mind and mentality against the claims of the "official doctrine" tracing to Descartes. This doctrine, with what Ryle characterized as its central dogma of the "ghost in the machine," presented what to him seemed a strangely divided picture of the mental and physical departments of a human life, treating these as though they were the subject of two largely separate and independent biographies. In response, Ryle suggested a logically unitary analysis of the bearing of "mentalist" terms on the description of actions and events of ordinary life. A key element of this suggestion was Ryle's analysis of the terms ordinarily taken to refer to perceptions or sensations as having a "dispositional" logic. That is, rather than referring to special items or object immediately present to consciousness,

Ryle suggested that they could be taken simply to attribute various kinds of tendencies, liabilities, and abilities to behave in ordinary perceptual situations. In this way analysis could bring the crucial recognition of the public and intersubjective character of language to bear against the subjectivist theories of mind that treated perception as grounded in the presence of immediately “given” mental objects such as sense-data. These theories could then cede to one that placed the possibility of attributing dispositions and capacities to perceive at the center of ordinary linguistic practice.

When Sellars took up his own analysis of the language of “inner episodes” in what would become his most famous work, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind (EPM)*, he inherited some of the most significant methodological components of Ryle’s inferentialist analysis. Familiarly, Sellars’ largest aim was to dispel what he called the “Myth of the Given,” the myth of unconceptualized and non-linguistic deliverances of experience at the basis of our knowledge of the world. The myth, Sellars thought, had been a central component of empiricist theories of perception and knowledge, both in their classical forms and, more recently, in the early explanatory projects of the analytic tradition. His criticism of it involved both a decisive appeal to the publicity of language and, as I shall argue, a determinative critical appreciation of the problems to which the attempt to describe first-person experience can lead. But although he shared Ryle’s anti-phenomenalist and anti-subjectivist motivations, Sellars nevertheless saw reason to criticize, in detail, Ryle’s dispositionalist account of sensation and perception. Understanding the reasons for this criticism, I shall argue, helps us to see the broader critical implications of a reflection on language for the specific problems of subjectivity and experience, problems it must encounter in taking up a more general inquiry into the significance of language for the form of a human life.

I

Readers of *The Concept of Mind* have long been familiar with Ryle’s anti-Cartesian *dispositionalism* about the meaning of many terms of mentalistic description. The core of Ryle’s suggestion is that concepts like those of knowing, believing, intending, and perceiving, can be analyzed in terms of verbal and non-verbal behaviors and capacities, tendencies, and abilities to behave in particular ways. This provides an alternative to the Cartesian assumption that they must as refer to occurrent states, processes and events in an inner, mental realm. A good example is the notion of “intelligence.” On the traditional Cartesian picture, Ryle suggests, intelligence seems to be a property of inner acts of thinking or conceiving. Thus, for instance, the Cartesian analyst understands someone’s *intelligently playing chess* as involving two essentially different kinds of actions: first, an inner, mental act of calculation or intellection (the act properly described as “intelligent,”), and second, a separate physical act of carrying out its result.² Ryle’s suggestion

is that the intelligent playing ought to be analyzed, instead, simply as an instance of playing by somebody possessing the familiar background of skills and abilities (dispositions) that make for what we call intelligence in chess-playing. We can investigate the origin of these general skills, and even investigate their physical or neurophysiological basis in the brain. But there is no need to describe the performance as involving a separable *mental* act which itself has the property or feature of “intelligence.”

Ryle supported his dispositionalism about mentalistic terms with a sophisticated semantic account of the logic and grammar of disposition-ascriptions in intersubjective discursive practice. Here as well, Ryle’s grammatical account steadfastly aims to avoid invoking the existence of esoteric private or inner mental events, items, or structures, even those that can be understood purely physicalistically and neurophysiologically. It can be no part, Ryle reasons, of the ascription of an ability to play chess intelligently or speak French competently that reference is made to any underlying mental or neurophysiological structure. For we need have no knowledge of such structures in order to ascribe these dispositions as we do in ordinary intersubjective practice.³ Indeed, in a chapter of *The Concept of Mind* devoted to the nature of dispositionalist analysis, Ryle clarifies that it is no part of his style of dispositionalism to require the ascription of any sort of *facts* at all (behavioral, neurophysiological, or otherwise). Instead, he offers what can be called a *non-factualist* account of disposition-ascriptions. On the account, to ascribe a skill, tendency, liability, proclivity (or any other of a variety of specific types of dispositions) is not to report the obtaining of any set of facts, but rather to operate among fact-statements.⁴ Ryle likens the role of disposition-ascriptions to the role of statements of physical law; both kinds of statements do not, he suggests, state facts but rather license certain patterns of inference among statements of them:

At least part of the point of trying to establish laws is to find out how to infer from particular matters of fact to other particular matters of fact, how to explain particular matters of fact by reference to other matters of fact, and how to bring about or prevent particular states of affairs. A law is used as, so to speak, an inference-ticket (a season ticket) which licenses its possessors to move from asserting factual statements to asserting other factual statements.⁵

The point of the statement of a causal or logical law, Ryle argues, is simply to allow inference from certain factual statements to other factual statements. Given this analysis, he goes on to suggest, we can see that the thought that the adoption of a law requires the recognition of a new entity (for instance a “causally necessary connection” between the states of affairs connected by a causal law) must be confused. For any such entity could only do the semantic work that the law-statement already does, namely issue a warrant for predictive and explanatory inference from one set of states of affairs to another.⁶

Like law-statements, Ryle argues, disposition-statements should be understood as having the logical job, not of reporting facts, but of licensing particular kinds and patterns of inference among fact-statements:

Dispositional statements about particular things and persons are ... like law statements in the fact that we use them in a partly similar way. They apply to, or they are satisfied by, the actions, reactions and states of the object; they are inference-tickets, which license us to predict, retrodict, explain and modify these actions, reactions and states ...

Dispositional statements are neither reports of observed or observable states of affairs, nor yet reports of unobserved or unobservable states of affairs. They narrate no incidents. But their jobs are intimately connected with narratives of incidents, for, if they are true, they are satisfied by narrated incidents.⁷

On the Rylean account, then, to say of someone that they know French is just to license certain inferences, for instance from their being presented with a French telegram to their reading it correctly; to say that Doe knows French is just to say if the antecedent of the inference is fulfilled, its consequent probably will be as well. Ordinary use of disposition-terms does not require that the inferences licensed by these inference tickets be exceptionless; they need only be likely to hold, under normal conditions.⁸ Indeed, the general inference-patterns allowed by particular disposition-statements are, Ryle argues, usually only partially satisfied by particular statements of fact. For instance, somebody may be called “irresponsible” after committing a particular error, although he has not in fact committed many of the other errors which the censure predicts he will or may commit, in particular circumstances. Ryle calls dispositional statements that are only partially satisfied by particular occurrences “mongrel-categorical statements,” and suggests that these include most of the dispositional and categorical statements that function in our ordinary language of mental life.⁹

Ryle’s analysis of the logic of disposition-statements exemplifies particularly clearly the bearing of analysis of the categorical structure of language on questions about what an earlier discourse would have described as our “inner” life. In the particular case of the language of sensations, Ryle makes the dispositional analysis central to his argument against the traditional empiricist or phenomenalist sense-datum theory of perception. His aim is to dispel the thought that the meaning of sensation-language involves its referring to a set of private or proprietary inner objects. To this end, Ryle aims to show that the standard perceptual cases on which the sense-datum theory trades can be analyzed along other lines than the sense-datum theorist suggests. For instance, where the sense-datum theorist is inclined to interpret the sense of “looks” in which a tilted plate “has an elliptical look” as showing the *existence* of an “elliptical look” of the round plate (conceived

as an inner item or set of *sensa*), Ryle proposes that the case be analyzed along dispositionalist lines:

In other words, the grammatically unsophisticated sentence “the plate has an elliptical look” does not, as the theory assumes, express one of those basic relational truths which are so much venerated in theory and so seldom used in daily life. It expresses a fairly complex proposition of which one part is both general and hypothetical. It is applying to the actual look of the plate a rule or a recipe about the typical looks of untilted elliptical plates, no matter whether there exist such pieces of china or not. It is what I have elsewhere called a mongrel-categorical statement . . . The expressions “it looks . . .”, “it looks as if . . .”, “it has the appearance of . . .”, “I might be seeing . . .” and plenty of others of the same family contain the force of a certain sort of open hypothetical prescription applied to a case at hand.¹⁰

Where the sense-datum theorist takes the familiar language of perception to involve commitment to the existence of epistemologically primary *sensa*, Ryle proposes to analyze it instead as involving hypotheticals connecting the ways things look in various conditions of perception to the ways they are. These include, for instance, the rule that tilted round plates often “look like” untilted elliptical ones. Indeed, Ryle argues that the language of looking is itself essentially dependent on the language with which we describe the public properties of publicly ascertainable objects.¹¹ To say that something *looks* a certain way just is to say that it seems as if it *is* that way, while also recognizing that, owing to non-standard perceptual conditions or error, it may not be. Our ability to employ the language of looking, then, is just our ability to comprehend the logical and inferential relations among the ways things can be and the ways they can seem to be, given non-standard perceptual conditions or cases of perceptual error. This language, significantly, stops short of introducing any such entities as “looks,” “appearances,” “seemings,” or “sensings,” hypostatized *events* that start the traditional theorist on the path toward substantial object-like sense-data.

In fact, Ryle goes on to suggest, the traditional theorist has misunderstood the nature of the logical gap between “looks”-talk and basic reports of how things actually are. According to Ryle, proponents of the traditional model discern rightly that, although knowledge about a public state of affairs will depend in part on simply observing that state of affairs, it will also depend on the satisfaction of further conditions, which may in some special cases fail to obtain. But they mistake these standing conditions for occurrent processes which are said to accompany the observation as it happens, or very soon afterward:

When a person is described as having seen the thimble, part of what is said is that he has had at least one visual sensation, but a good deal

more is said as well. Theorists commonly construe this as meaning that a description of a person as having seen the thimble both says that he had at least one visual sensation and says that he did or underwent something else as well; and they ask accordingly, "What else did the finder of the thimble do or undergo, such that he would not have found the thimble if he had not done or undergone these extra things?" Their queries are then answered by stories about some very swift and unnoticed inferences, or some sudden and unrememberable intellectual leaps, or some fetching up of concepts and clapping them upon the heads of the visual data. They assume, that is, that because the proposition "he espied the thimble" has a considerable logical complexity, it therefore reports a considerable complication of processes.¹²

For Ryle, then, talk of perceptions and sensations is to be analyzed as involving the application of learned rules within a logically prior descriptive language. The ability to apply these rules is theoretically inseparable from our mastery of an ordinary language, a kind of mastery we ascribe to anyone we consider to be perceptually and linguistically competent. The normal assumption of perceptual competence is itself essential to our understanding of what is said when agents report the ways things look or seem to them. But this assumption is just the attribution of a disposition, an attribution that we make to anyone who has mastered ordinary perceptual and observational concepts. The most important precondition for justification in issuing the attribution, and the most important component in the judgment that an agent is perceptually competent, is entitlement to suppose the agent's perceptual and observational reports, when made in standard conditions, accurate. Like the other disposition-attributions that Ryle discusses, the attribution of perceptual competence operates as an inference-ticket, allowing the ascriber to infer from the agent's observational report to the probability of things being as they are reported to be.

Ryle's theory, therefore, is *eliminativist* with respect to at least some of the *apparent* commitments of sensation-reports and other seeming reports of inner states and processes. According to Ryle, the forms of language that appear to give support to a conception of the inner life can uniformly be analyzed as involving *only* commitments to public and publicly observable facts and their grammatical interrelations. The suggestion of the eliminability of the commitments of the language of the "inner" is itself motivated, most of all, by Ryle's claim to trace the actual commitments of ordinary language by systematically reflecting on the use of its terms. In thus turning reflection on the systematic structure of language to the criticism of those earlier theories that place individual, subjective experience at the center of their accounts of content, Ryle both continues the methods, and deepens the results, of the critique of psychologism that Frege and Wittgenstein had already pursued. Here, indeed, this critique drives to what is perhaps its most radically formulated bearing against traditional accounts

of the “interiority” of experience. Whereas earlier practitioners had been content to criticize philosophically or scientifically specialized psychologistic theories of content, Ryle adduces grounds for thinking that the entire metaphor of “interiority,” as it is used in ordinary discourse, as well as specialized philosophical discourses, is without foundation.

At the same time, however, its revisionist suggestions with respect to the apparent commitments of ordinary usage to the description of inner life invite the objection that Ryle’s theory has, in the end, actually failed to capture some of the most ordinarily significant features of this usage itself. In particular, on Ryle’s account, my description of my own sensory state embodies nothing that could not equally well be recognized from the perspective of another observer. The state of affairs it identifies—including my recognition of the possible non-veridicality of my own perceptual state—is in no sense particularly private or even first-personal. It is a perfectly public, objective matter of the configuration of one’s perceptual devices and abilities. Accordingly, on Ryle’s theory, what appears to be the report of a sensation has no special claim to be true if issued in the first person; it is simply the description of a perceptual state of affairs, and may as well be taken to be true from any perspective.

But it is a familiar feature of our ordinary language of sensation, and indeed of all first-person reports of experience, that the reporter does enjoy a special epistemic and semantic privilege in making the report. Such reports are routinely entitled, in ordinary intersubjective linguistic practice, to a default assumption of accuracy; indeed, it is not even obviously coherent to assume that one *can* be mistaken about one’s own present sensations.¹³ And even if Ryle can reduce the first-person uses of sensation language to correspondent first-person uses of perception language involving talk of “looks,” the Rylean theory has no account, in either case, of the special authority—the default claim to be taken true—that characterizes them. For all Ryle says, the locutions that seem to report on the existence of perceptions and sensations might as well be empirical descriptions of one’s own perceptual states, enjoying no greater antecedent claim to truth than any other empirical description. Ryle’s theory fails, in other words, to construe sensation-reports genuinely as reports: declarative utterances that are, if true, caused in part by the states of affairs that make them true. Instead, on Ryle’s theory, sensation-reports are actually descriptions of the objective perceptual situation of the perceiver. This, however, seems to badly mischaracterize the semantics of these locutions, with precipitous consequences for the place of first-person experience in Ryle’s theory.

II

At first glance, Sellars’ theoretical aims in “Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind” (*EPM*) with respect to sensations and sensation-reports seem strikingly similar to Ryle’s. Both philosophers want to dispel the theory of

sense-data, both in its Cartesian and contemporary forms, and the empiricism in which it figures. They both aim to defeat the sense-datum theorist's conception of sensations as epistemologically ultimate by emphasizing the role of conceptual training as a precondition to even the simplest sensation-reports. Such reports can no longer be treated as epistemologically foundational, both philosophers argue, once the *linguistic* preconditions for their use are appreciated. Both recognize as central to their own projects, moreover, the analysis of our ordinary language of observation, perception, and sensation. In particular, the actual epistemological significance of seeming perceptual and sensory reports is to be determined by their ordinary linguistic roles, as this is shown in everyday use. But on at least one centrally important point, Sellars' theoretical aim is different from Ryle's, and indeed arises, in part, from a direct criticism of the limitations of Ryle's program. For Sellars is centrally concerned to preserve, rather than dispute, the meaningfulness of the forms of language with which we seem to refer to inner processes and episodes such as sensations.

If we insist, as Sellars and Ryle both do, that only public objects (and never sensations or impressions) literally have properties like being red or triangular, we can easily, Sellars suggests, be led to think that we never directly refer to such inner items at all. On this line of argument, we can only characterize them indirectly, via definite descriptions, in the language of public events and properties. But in following this line, Sellars notes, "we would scarcely seem to be any better off than if we maintained that talk about 'impressions' is a notational convenience, a code, for the language in which we speak of how things look and what there looks to be."¹⁴ And in explicit criticism of Ryle, Sellars argues that any theory that follows this line will fail to account for important features of our ordinary discourse:

Indeed, once we think this line of reasoning through, we are struck by the fact that if it is sound, we are faced not only with the question "How could we come to have the idea of an 'impression' or 'sensation?'" but by the question "How could we come to have the idea of something's looking red to us, or," to get to the crux of the matter, "of seeing that something is red?" In short, we are brought face to face with the general problem of understanding how there can be inner episodes—episodes, that is, which somehow combine privacy, in that each of us has privileged access to his own, with intersubjectivity, in that each of us can, in principle, know about the other's.¹⁵

Sellars' criticism of Ryle is subtle and far-reaching. Ryle's dispositionalist account of the language of "impressions" and "sensations" treats this language as a shorthand, a notational replacement for discussion of how things look or seem to us. But even if Ryle can reduce the language of "sensations" and "impressions" in this way, the special logical features of the supposedly anterior language of ways of looking or seeming themselves stand in need of explanation. Reducing language about sensations and impressions to

language about ways of looking and seeming simply pushes the problem back. We still lack an account of the distinctive kind of authority that inner-state reports, whether reports of sensation or of perception, can have. Sellars insists that there will be no way to solve *this* problem without confronting the issue of inner episodes: without, that is, discovering how there can be items or events that be, at the same time, both *descriptive* objects of public language and *episodic* sources of our reports:

We might try to put this more linguistically as the problem of how there can be a sentence (e.g. "S has a toothache") of which it is *logically* true that whereas anybody can use it to state a fact, only *one* person, namely S himself, can use it to make a report. But while this is a useful formulation, it does not do justice to the supposedly *episodic* character of the items in question. And that this is the heart of the puzzle is shown by the fact that many philosophers who would not deny that there are short-term hypothetical and mongrel hypothetical-categorical facts about behavior which others can ascribe to us on behavioral evidence, but which only *we* can *report*, have found it to be logical nonsense to speak of non-behavioral *episodes* of which this is true. Thus, it has been claimed by Ryle that the very idea that there are such episodes is a category mistake, while others have argued that though there are such episodes, they cannot be characterized in intersubjective discourse, learned as it is in a context of public objects and in the "academy" of one's linguistic peers. It is my purpose to argue that both these contentions are quite mistaken, and that not only are inner episodes *not* category mistakes, they are quite "effable" in intersubjective discourse.¹⁶

Without an account of how seeming reports of "sensations" and "impressions" can genuinely be reports of inner episodes, Sellars suggests, we will be unable to capture the logical features of these reports that account for their functioning, in intersubjective discourse, as they do. In particular, we will lack an account of how these seeming reports can be reports of happenings that seem in a certain way proprietary to their bearers, a status which is recognized in the default assumption of truth that reports of them enjoy when issued in the first person.

Sellars mentions his aim of preserving the meaningfulness of discourse about inner episodes often enough to show that it is one of the main theoretical goals of his account in *EPM*. He cites the explication of the "logical status of impressions or immediate experiences," for instance, as the main purpose of the famous Myth of Jones. With this reconstructive story, Sellars aims to show how a group of people initially limited to a "Rylean" language capable only of referring to the public properties of public objects could, once given the resources to discuss the *semantic* properties of their own language, develop a mode of discourse about inner episodes and states with all the logical features of our own inner-state language.¹⁷

Indeed, Sellars suggests that his attack on the Myth of the Given will not really succeed unless it can preserve at least *some* of the theoretical motivations, implicit in ordinary language, that provided support for the traditional empiricist picture of sensation-reports as representing a semantically and epistemologically special stratum of knowledge. For Sellars as for Ryle, the meaningfulness of observation-reports depends upon their being generated by a reporter with the ordinary perceptual and conceptual abilities of a competent adult observer. What is ascribed in ascribing these abilities is itself at least partially comprehensible in terms of their inferential articulation.¹⁸ To judge someone's perceptual report meaningful, then, is, at least in part, just to ascribe them the normal suite of perceptual and conceptual abilities, which in turn is just to issue the kind of inference-ticket that such ascription involves. But for Sellars, the ascription of competence that figures in the authority of perceptual and observational reports is not simply the issuance of an inference-ticket. For in addition to the intersubjectively ascertainable reliability that perceptual competence involves, Sellars insists that the meaningfulness of an agent's perceptual and observational reports depends, as well, on the agent's *knowledge* that her reports are normally reliable.

This additional requirement of knowledge goes beyond anything that Ryle's theory demands or suggests. Sellars insists on it—what I shall call Sellars' *knowledge requirement*—at several points in *EPM*. He formulates it most directly in section 35:

For if the authority of the report "This is green" lies in the fact that the existence of green items appropriately related to the perceiver can be inferred from the occurrence of such reports, it follows that only a person who is able to draw this inference, and therefore who has not only the concept *green*, but also the concept of uttering "This is green"—indeed, the concept of certain conditions of perception, those which would correctly be called "standard conditions"—could be in a position to token "This is green" in recognition of its authority. In other words, for a *Konstatierung* "This is green" to "express observational knowledge," not only must it be a *symptom* or *sign* of the presence of a green object in standard conditions, but the perceiver must know that tokens of "This is green" *are* symptoms of the presence of green objects in conditions which are standard for visual perception.¹⁹

The requirement might seem innocuous, but actually it represents an important divergence from Ryle's account and a key element of Sellars' own argument against the Myth of the Given. Indeed, Sellars goes on to say that the requirement is essential to showing that observation-reports are not epistemically basic in the sense in which traditional empiricism takes them to be:

Now it might be thought that there is something obviously absurd in the idea that before a token uttered by, say, Jones could be the expression of

observational knowledge, Jones would have to know that overt verbal episodes of this kind are reliable indicators of the existence, suitably related to the speaker, of green objects. I do not think that it is. Indeed, I think that something very like it is true. The point I wish to make now, however, is that if it *is* true, then it follows, as a matter of simple logic, that one couldn't have observational knowledge of *any* fact unless one knew many *other* things as well. And let me emphasize that the point is not taken care of by distinguishing between *knowing how* and *knowing that*, and admitting that observational knowledge requires a lot of "know how." For the point is specifically that observational knowledge of any particular fact, e.g. that this is green, presupposes that one knows general facts of the form *X is a reliable symptom of Y*. And to admit this requires an abandonment of the traditional empiricist idea that observational knowledge "stands on its own feet."²⁰

Even if the meaningfulness of observation-reports can be analyzed in terms of their issuers' possession of standard perceptual and conceptual abilities, it is essential to Sellars' story that it additionally involves the reporter's possession of general knowledge about the reliability of particular sentence tokens in reporting particular states of affairs. This knowledge is not, as Ryle would have it, explicable simply as "knowledge-how" in contrast to "knowledge that." That is, it cannot be explained simply as a matter of our possession of various kinds of ability or dispositions. It is this that shows that, *contra* the epistemological foundationalist's theory of them, "basic" observation-reports already presuppose a substantial amount of general knowledge, and so cannot be the ultimate basis of empirical knowledge in the way foundationalism takes them to be.

To understand the reason for the requirement, it is helpful to reflect on its setting within Sellars' critical discussion of a specific form of epistemic foundationalism. Sellars states the requirement in the course of his reconstructive discussion of the logical empiricist view according to which observation-reports are immediate reports on a stratum of inner and private experiences, non-verbal episodes which are held to be *self-authenticating* in that their authority does not rest on anything but themselves.²¹ On the view, which was held most closely by Schlick, basic observation-reports are the immediate expression of the content of more primary experiential episodes called *Konstatierungen*. The *Konstatierungen* themselves were taken to be infallible, and to have a non-verbal or pre-verbal logical form. The authority of basic observation-reports was then thought to derive, as is suggested by their usual inclusion of indexical or token-reflexive expressions (terms like "I" and "now," as in what was taken to be the standard form of a sense-datum report, "I am having a red sensation now"), from their being made in the *presence* of the experiences on which they report. The kind of authority, or claim to be believed, that these reports have would then be essentially different from the kind of authority possessed by other propositional claims.

For whereas the authority of most sentence-tokens can be understood in terms of the *inferential role* of the contents they express—the kinds of evidence that support them, and the kinds of inferences that can be drawn from them—the authority of observation-reports would depend instead on the *conditions* under which tokens of them are issued.

Thus, whereas propositional authority ordinarily flows from *sentence-types* to *sentence-tokens* (so that a token sentence is authoritative in virtue of its being a token of the sentence-type that it is a token of) the epistemic use of observational reports would involve a kind of authority that flows in the opposite direction, from sentence-tokens authorized by their conditions of utterance (and involving indexicals) to sentence-types expressing non-indexical observational contents. This would give them a kind of ultimate credibility, a credibility that does not depend on their relation to other propositional contents or tokens. Their having this kind of credibility, it is then reasonable to think, would be essential to their claim to express observational knowledge at all, knowledge that is the direct outcome of observational processes rather than inference from other propositions. At the same time, it would be comparable to the ultimate credibility of analytic statements, statements that are true simply in virtue of the conventional rules of linguistic usage. This parallel suggested to Schlick and others that the correctness of an observational report like “This is green” ought to be thought of as depending simply on one’s following the “rules of use” for the term “green” and the indexical term “this,” rules of use that call for the utterance of the observational report when, and only when, the requisite *Konstatierung* is present.

Unsurprisingly, Sellars rejects Schlick’s view itself as an instance of the Myth of the Given. The postulated *Konstatierungen* would comprise an ineffable stratum of immediate and self-authorizing, linguistically ineffable but somehow semantically contentful episodes.²² They are, in other words, typical instances of the unexplained Given; and the consistent point of Sellars’ insistence on the social and linguistic preconditions for these basic reports is that these reports do not rest, conceptually or evidentially, exclusively on any such ineffable episodes.²³ But though his diagnosis of the Myth involves his showing that ineffable inner episodes cannot be the foundations of empirical knowledge, Sellars emphasizes that his account nevertheless aims to make room for effable inner episodes that are in a sense non-linguistic.²⁴ As Sellars’ subsequent remarks clarify, in fact, its ability to do so actually arises from its preservation of one of the most important components of Schlick’s view, the suggestion that observation-reports have the authority that they do in virtue of their being made under the particular conditions that they are.

Immediately after rejecting Schlick’s view as an instance of the Myth of the Given, Sellars considers what kind of theoretical view of observation-reports, though purged of Givenness, might still capture their claim to express genuine observational knowledge. He begins by contemplating a standard reliabilist account, according to which:

An overt or covert token of “This is green” in the presence of a green item is a *Konstatierung* and expresses observational knowledge if and only if it is a manifestation of a tendency to produce overt or covert tokens of “This is green” . . . if and only if a green object is being looked at in standard conditions.²⁵

The reliabilist account shares with Schlick’s account the guiding idea that observation-reports have the authority that they do have, an authority that flows from sentence-token to sentence-type, because of the conditions under which they are issued. The difference is just that the reliabilist account replaces Schlick’s inner, experiential episodes with the presence of a general disposition—a reliable tendency—to produce tokens of the right types in the right circumstances. On the reliabilist account, it is in virtue of their being an instance of such a tendency that observation-reports have authority. But Sellars concludes that the unaugmented reliabilist account still fails to preserve the claim of observation-reports to express genuine observational knowledge. For this claim to be preserved, the account must be supplemented with two additional conditions.²⁶ First, Schlick’s understanding of the credibility of observation-reports as involving the correct following, by the reporter, of semantic rules, has to be replaced with an essentially *social* account of the kind of correctness that authoritative observation-reports exhibit.²⁷ In other words, the authority of observation-reports must be seen as deriving not only from an individual’s following linguistic “rules of use” but from their (in so doing) reflecting reliable tendencies that are intersubjectively ascribed in a linguistic community.

As they were for Ryle, these tendencies are intelligible as dispositions, demonstrated and attributed in a social context. But second, in addition to this social requirement, Sellars also adds the requirement of *knowledge* of reliability that we’ve already discussed. This knowledge of reliable connections between reports and the inferences they make possible that Sellars refers to in accounting for the authority of first-person experiential reports plays a central role in *EPM*, and particularly in the concluding Myth of Jones. The most decisive chapter in the story is the invention of a theory of internal processes by the genius Jones on the model of semantic discourse. The Rylean ancestors become able to talk about each other’s thoughts by internalizing the language with which they formerly talked about the meaning and truth of each other’s public statements.²⁸ Given these semantic resources, Jones invents a “theory” of inner episodes on the model of overt verbal behavior, semantically characterized.²⁹ It is, in fact, essential to his ability to invent the theory that the inner states characterized by it can be described using the same semantic predicates as can already be used to talk about overt utterances. It is essential, in other words, to the identity of the postulated inner states that they can be described as “meaning” this or that or being “about” this or that.³⁰ Without this possibility of description, they would not be intelligible as the states that they are; but the possibility of

reporting their identity is itself dependent on the application to them of the concepts ordinarily used to describe objective phenomena and events. They inherit their content from the common content of the public utterances that exemplify the perceptual and observational reports that can be made in the various situations where we describe things as looking or being thus-and-so, and therefore depend constitutively on the subject's ability to issue those reports in standard and non-standard perceptual conditions. And that ability, together with all the conceptual and semantic knowledge it implies, is just what is required by the knowledge requirement.

The knowledge of reliable usage that Sellars requires as the background of our use of perceptual concepts, if we are to be counted as competent users of these concepts at all, thus plays a central role in enabling his theory to give a plausible account of the authority of first-person reports. In earlier accounts such as Schlick's that did not share Sellars' commitment to a wholly public and intersubjective account of the acquisition and use of first-person language, the reference and authority of such reports was explained by reference to the immediate deliverances of Givenness. For Sellars, though, a speaker's knowledge that a semantic token such as "green" can (reliably) be used in referring to green objects is itself sufficient to ground the authority that the earlier theories relied on the givenness of green *sensa* or *Konstatierungen* to explain. This knowledge about reliable use is semantic knowledge; where present, it counts as conferring on its possessor knowledge of the meaning of the term "green" in ordinary discourse and practice. It is knowledge that we can be expected to have, inasmuch as we speak a language at all, and which would be inaccessible to us if we did not. Our attribution of it to an agent expresses, in other terms, the judgment that that agent is a member of the linguistic community in which we, ourselves, live or can live.

III

We have seen that Sellars' insistence on the knowledge requirement figures essentially in his claim to defeat traditional empiricism by showing that even basic perceptual reports already logically require a substantial amount of general knowledge. This explanatory connection between semantic knowledge and inner discourse has its home, beyond and before *EPM*, in a broader Sellarsian project of *pure pragmatics*. This project understands semantical concepts as supporting logical structure in virtue of their linguistic roles, and aims to solve traditional philosophical problems, including the traditional "mind-body" problem, through a characterization of the "pragmatics" of their use. Sellars articulated the project in a variety of articles over the second half of the 1940s; but it is sketched only partially and elliptically in *EPM* itself.³¹ We shall see that an appreciation of the contours of the program clarifies the role of the questions Sellars addresses in that work within the larger history of the methods and practices of analytic philosophy's

reflection on ordinary language, and of the problems to which the characterization of its logical structure is prone.

Starting in the late 1940s, Sellars offered “pure pragmatics” as a supplement to the existing formal characterizations of syntactic and semantic notions. The supplement would be pure in that it would retain the non-factual and *a priori* character of existing formal analyses. But it would be pragmatic in that it would give a formal analysis of semantic predicates like “meaningful” and “verified,” predicates whose adequate analysis would require a formal explanation of how an *entire language* or the large subset of one that is “empirical” can be meaningful at all.³² Thus, pure pragmatics would comprise a “pure theory of empirically meaningful languages,” and its formal analysis would display the pragmatic conditions that are required for any speech behavior to amount to empirically meaningful language at all.³³

Sellars’ clearest pre-*EPM* application of the program of pure pragmatics to the problems of philosophy of mind is the 1953 article “A Semantical Solution to the Mind-Body Problem.” The article is historically significant in its own right, for it offers what can be understood as the earliest suggestion in the philosophical literature of a *functionalist* theory of mental-state terms. On such theories, these terms are understood as meaningful in virtue of the patterns of use that define their conceptual roles, and thereby identify the semantic “place” of the mental events to which they refer.³⁴ The core of the article’s analysis is a consideration of the possibility and implications of a “behaviorist” analysis of mental terms like “thinks” and closely connected semantic terms like “means.”³⁵ As in *EPM*, Sellars does not defend a (Rylean) “logical behaviorism,” according to which mentalistic and semantic discourse would be logically reducible to discourse about the behavior of bodies.³⁶ Instead, he sketches a “scientific behaviorism” that would uphold truth-functional or material—but possibly empirical and *a posteriori*—equivalences between mentalistic statements and statements characterizing only bodily behavior.³⁷ And as in *EPM*, Sellars begins with the thought that these equivalences, if they obtained, would analyze mental terms by identifying them with dispositions to behave and episodes *qua* expressing such dispositions. Smith’s thought that it is raining outside might, for instance, be identified by a behavioristic psychology with Smith’s tendency to behave in particular ways, for instance his behavior of reaching for his umbrella and putting on his raincoat, along with, of course, the tendency to utter the linguistic expression “it is raining” and other suitably connected expressions.³⁸ But it is immediately clear that the last-mentioned kind of tendency poses additional problems for the behaviorist analysis. For the requirement of it is not just the requirement that Smith tend to utter a particular set of noises (it could be just as well satisfied, if Smith were a German speaker, by his tendency to utter the completely different set of noises “es regnet”) but that he utter a set of noises which mean “it is raining.”³⁹

This difficulty marks the essential difference of Sellars’ semantically based account from the behaviorist theories he criticizes. Such theories, insofar as

they are genuinely behaviorist, are limited to describing verbal behavior in terms of the actual utterances issued and the normal occasions of their utterance. But a genuinely explanatory semantics, Sellars realized, would have to describe not only the utterances themselves but also what an earlier age of philosophical reflection would have characterized as their “meanings.” That is, it would have to characterize the abstract features (as it seemed to Sellars) of their use that make it possible for two tokens of a language on different occasions, or two wholly different utterances in different languages, to mean “the same thing.” Within the broader program of pure pragmatics, this required that the analyst give an account of the semantic and pragmatic functioning of the predicate “means,” and Sellars now undertakes to provide a description of this functioning. He exploits the central idea that to describe a sentence as *meaning* thus-and-so is to characterize it as occupying a particular role in the cognitive economy of the speaker. The predicate “means” has the metalinguistic use of gesturing at this kind of role, a role which may be shared by several different sentence-types across different particular languages. The problem, as it now stands, concerns the implications of a behaviorist analysis of sentences of the form “Smith utters ‘es regnet’ where ‘es regnet’ means *it is raining*” into sentences purely about behavior. If the behaviorist analysis is possible, Sellars argues, it will issue in equivalences of the form

“Es regnet” uttered by b means *it is raining* \leftrightarrow ; Ψ (“es regnet”, b)

where the right side of the biconditional “says of b that it has certain habits relating its utterances of ‘es regnet’ to other utterances, to other habits, and to sensory stimuli.”⁴⁰ As the predicate “means” is generally used, “es regnet” can mean the same thing when uttered by a German speaker as “il pleut” means when uttered by a French speaker; so we can take it that the habits of the German speaker with respect to “es regnet” share a “common generic feature” with the habits of the French speaker with respect to “il pleut.” Thus, if the behaviorist identification is possible, we can write the general schema:

“... ” uttered by b means *it is raining* \leftrightarrow ; K (“...”, b)

where K (“...”, b) says that b has the particular habits concerning “... ” that qualify it, when uttered by b, to mean *it is raining*.⁴¹ In other words, the right-hand side of the biconditional says that “... ” occupies the particular pragmatic and conceptual role in b’s cognitive economy that makes it an utterance meaning that it is raining. Its occupying this role can only be understood as its instancing the generic tendencies and habits which qualify b as a competent user of the phrase “it is raining.” Viewed from another direction, of course, these generic tendencies and habits are just those that qualify b as a competent verbal reporter of *rain*.

The suggested analysis of the semantic term “means,” then, analyzes the assertion that an utterance has a particular meaning as the assertion that it occupies a particular semantic role in the cognitive economy of a speaker, or, equivalently, that it is a manifestation of particular behaviorally comprehensible habits and dispositions. But it is essential to the pragmatic character of Sellars’ suggestion about the nature of mentalistic terms that one cannot, in general, specify the semantic role in question except by issuing, in one’s own language, a token utterance that occupies it. Equivalently, one cannot, in general, specify the habits and dispositions that a meaningful token of a particular content must manifest, without issuing a token utterance that itself manifests those very habits and dispositions:

Now we are all familiar with the fact that when we say “Jones’ utterances of ‘es regnet’ means it is raining” we are mentioning “es regnet” and using “it is raining” to convey what is meant by “es regnet” as uttered by Jones. According to Scientific Behaviorism, if what we say of Jones’ utterances is true, then the utterance “it is raining” which we *use* is the manifestation of habits generically identical with Jones’ habits with respect to “es regnet”. Thus, when I utter

“Es regnet” uttered by b means it is raining ↔; K (“es regnet”, b)

the “it is raining” of the left hand side is a manifestation of the habits mentioned by “K (‘it is raining’, Sellars)”, and when I utter

“It is raining” uttered by Sellars means *it is raining* ↔; K(“it is raining”, Sellars)

the unquoted “it is raining” on the left hand side is a *manifestation* of the habits mentioned by the right hand side.⁴²

Sellars thus emphasizes that a description of a speaker’s utterance as meaning thus-and-so can convey information about the semantic role of the utterance by comprising an utterance that occupies the same general role, without involving any description of the role itself. Indeed, this possibility of showing without saying is essential to the ordinary functioning of the predicate “means” itself. The most typical and basic use of this predicate is in connection with judgments of the form “ ‘a’ means that b.” Such judgments can compare propositions in two different languages, or they can compare two different formulations in the same language of (what is thereby asserted to be) the same fact. When we issue them, we are, as Sellars says, essentially demonstrating a semantic role by instantiating it. Our assertion of identity of meaning will be understood only by someone who already possesses the habits and dispositions thereby instantiated.

This point is central to Sellars' suggestion of a kind of behavioristic analysis of mentalistic terms that stops short of the logically necessary identities that would be required by "logical" (as opposed to "scientific") behaviorism. On the analysis, the ascription of mental states in ordinary discourse (for instance the determination of the character of an agent's thoughts) depends, in general, on the possibility of characterizing those states as having propositional meanings, and thus on the pragmatic possibility of *conveying* without *specifying* the conceptual roles of the utterances they are modeled on. The identities of meaning in which the analysis issues do not, then, reduce mental states to behaviors and dispositions. Rather, the analysis shows how discourse about mental states can be understood as discourse "about" behavioral dispositions and habits, in the special pragmatic sense of "about" in which a semantic sentence can be "about" a semantic role by exemplifying without specifying that role.⁴³ This kind of exemplification cannot be understood, in general, except through a pragmatic description of the capability of semantic discourse to show or exhibit what it does not explicitly state. Accordingly, it is a consequence of the suggested analysis that a particular mental state can be construed as meaningful only by an interpreter capable of employing utterances with the same linguistic role as that occupied by the expression of that state:

While we can convey how Jones uses "es regnet" by the use of "es regnet" uttered by Jones means it is raining" only to someone who shares our habits with respect to "it is raining", we can convey this information even though neither of us has a "clear and distinct" idea of what these habits are, and even though neither of us is able to characterize these habits without the repeated use of statements of the form "S means ****", and indeed of the form "in Jones' mind there is a thought about ****".⁴⁴

Because semantical pragmatics is (loosely put) a matter of showing rather than saying, only someone capable of meaningfully making an utterance can describe the same utterance, when issued by another agent, as meaningful. And only someone capable of occupying the particular meaningful mental state at issue can describe someone else as being in that very same (type of) state.

With this "semantical solution" explicitly in mind, we can understand just how the kind of semantic knowledge embodied by Sellars' knowledge requirement in *EPM* makes possible a description of the logic of inner-episode descriptions that avoids the logical reductionism of Ryle's account. Sellars explicitly employs the semantic solution, and to its special pragmatic sense of "implication," in explaining how the Jonesian myth can show that semantic discourse about inner states need not be reduced to a definitional shorthand or notational variant of the original Rylean language limited to the description of behavioral states and dispositions:

And let me emphasize . . . that to make a semantical statement about a verbal event is not a shorthand way of talking about its causes and effects, although there is a sense of “imply” in which semantical statements about verbal productions do *imply* information about the causes and effects of these productions. Thus when I say “‘*Es regnet*’ means it is raining,” my statement “implies” that the causes and effects of utterances of “*Es regnet*” beyond the Rhine parallel the causes and effects of utterances of “It is raining” by myself and other members of the English-speaking community. And if it didn’t imply this, it couldn’t perform its role. But this is not to say that semantical statements are definitional shorthand for statements about the causes and effects of verbal performances.⁴⁵

The Rylean analysis commits itself to a dispositionalist understanding of inner-state descriptions in terms of the semantic roles occupied by their typical verbal expressions, and thus, at least in principle, to an ultimate reduction of the language of inner-state descriptions to the language of causal descriptions of behavioral dispositions. For instance, Ryle’s analysis understands the attribution, to Jones, of the thought that it is raining as simply the attribution of a particular disposition to Jones. This attribution is itself simply the judgment that Jones will issue a token utterance with a particular semantic role under particular conditions. On the Rylean analysis, this semantic role can be characterized simply in terms of the kinds of situations which causally elicit the utterance, so the Rylean analyst commits herself, at least in principle, to the view that descriptions of inner states must be reducible to the purely causal description of the typical causes and effects of particular verbal utterances. But Sellars’ semantic solution shows how the semantic role of an utterance might be pragmatically identified in semantic discourse without any specification of its typical causes and effects. It thereby makes room for the possibility of a language for the description of inner episodes that arises (as in the Myth of Jones) from the Rylean causal language when that language is supplemented with semantic discourse, without being reducible to causal or causal-plus-semantic language. On the Sellarsian story, this inner-episode language will be *theoretical* in the sense of having been introduced for the purposes of explaining and predicting overt verbal and semantic behavior. But it will also exhibit, in its positing of inner states as new entities, a descriptive autonomy that makes it irreducible to those earlier strata of descriptive language.

On Sellars’ account, then, the issuance of an inner-state report is not simply the issuance of a redescription of one’s own behavior or behavioral dispositions. It is, instead, the issuance of a piece of semantic discourse, discourse that essentially exploits the special logical features of the predicate “means”. And as such, it is a piece of discourse which, if understood, must be understood as showing (or “implying,” in Sellars’ special pragmatic sense of “implies”) the existence of a complex semantic disposition that the listener herself possesses. To be able to understand such a report, then, implies knowledge not only of the normal occasions of its production in an

individual's habitual behavior, but also of the ordinary circumstances of the use of its constituent terms in the linguistic practice of a community as a whole; this latter kind of knowledge marks its understanding as a manifestation of the ability to speak a language that one shares with such a community, insofar as one is a member of it. Their essential exploitation of semantic discourse gives first-person inner-state reports (like first-personal semantic discourse generally) a kind of authority that flows from token to type rather than type to token; the comprehension of the token essentially involves the recognition that that token was produced in the right sort of way, and thus endows it with a default presumption of truth. The token sentence itself thus bears the presumption of its truth in the conditions of its comprehension.⁴⁶

In comparison with Ryle's account, as well as other applications of the methods of inferentialism and holizstic analysis to the problems of "philosophy of mind" and subjective experience, Sellars' semantically based account therefore goes some way to restoring something like a theory of the authority and privilege of the subject. But what is most remarkable about Sellars' account, in the perspective of a broader history of the methods of linguistic analysis and reflection, is not simply its capacity to restore some of the ordinary logical features of first-person description and reporting by means of an appeal to our knowledge of a language. It is, rather, the pervasive and essential ambiguity it demonstrates in the form of this knowledge itself. Indeed, with Sellars' semantic account, our ordinary knowledge of the language that we speak is shown to be capable of grounding ordinary attributional practice *only insofar as* it is opaque to theoretical description. Not only the authority of first-person reports, but indeed the entire possibility of semantic discourse on which it is based, depends on our ability to instantiate or display our knowledge of the regularities of a language without further describing them. The semantic roles underlying the use of ordinary terms might indeed be describable within a total structuralist description of the language as a whole, but such an account, like the Rylean one that Sellars criticizes, would make the distinctive authority of first-person accounts inexplicable. In place of those theories that appealed to an ineffable subjectivity to ground first-person authority in what were conceived as the deliverances of pre-conceptual givenness, therefore, Sellars appeals to the capacity of language to refer to, by instantiating, its own regular structure. But the account makes the structure of language, again, essentially ineffable on the level of its explanatory theoretical description. The given mental objects or sense data whose mute presence earlier theories placed at the foundation of the possibility of knowledge are thereby replaced, as promised, with the understanding that we can be taken to have, and regularly appeal to, insofar as we speak a language at all. But the mystery of what is involved in this understanding is by no means cleared up. Rather, the linguistic roles whose demonstration is, according to Sellars, the essential basis for any possibility of semantic discourse now themselves amount to theoretically ineffable objects of a recurrent and essential appeal.

5 Quine's appeal to use and the genealogy of indeterminacy

The envisioning of language that has long marked the analytic tradition involved, at first, only a relatively vague and inexplicit conception of language's "use," "application," or intersubjective "practice." Even this vague and inexplicit conception was, as we have seen, already enough to suggest some of the fundamental ambiguities that arise from placing an appeal to language at the center of the methods of philosophy. But it was left to the second generation of analytic philosophers, those who also played the largest role in consolidating and spreading the tradition as a unity, to develop more explicitly the more problematic implications of its methods. One of the most significant and enduring of these expressions is W. V. O. Quine's model of "radical translation" and the notorious thesis of *indeterminacy of translation* to which it led.

Over a period of 25 years, from the period of his first published writings to his seminal *Word and Object*, Quine moved by stages away from the "logical syntax" project of his mentor Carnap, and toward the "radical translation" or "radical interpretation" model of linguistic understanding. The model seeks to reconstruct the facts about the meaning and interpretation of a language in terms of the publicly accessible knowledge available, in principle, to a field linguist initially innocent of the language under interpretation. It thus captures, probably as completely as is possible, the thought that to understand a language is to understand a *structure* of signs that are offered and consumed in a public, social context. But the most significant implication of the radical translation model is not its formulation of a structuralist picture of language, but rather the way its result undermines this picture from within. For almost as soon as Quine had fully conceived the radical translation model, he also saw its radical implication: that the meaning of ordinary sentences, though entirely grounded in the publicly accessible facts of language-use, is also systematically *indeterminate* with respect to the totality of those facts.

The indeterminacy result was first articulated in *Word and Object* (1960), but it had developed gradually, in Quine's own thinking, over the 25 years of his dialogue with Carnap. Over the period from 1934 to 1950, Quine came by stages to question and then entirely to reject the traditional distinction

between analytic and synthetic statements, and with it also the intuitive notions of logical necessity, synonymy, meaning and intention that Carnap and others had used it to explicate. The publication, in 1951, of Quine's influential "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" marked a watershed moment in this development; in the article, Quine made explicit his rejection of the analytic/synthetic distinction and began to articulate his own, alternative picture of epistemology. But years before this watershed, the seed of both Quine's divergence from Carnap and his elaboration of the radical translation scenario had already been planted with a subtle but unmistakable appeal that already appears in some of Quine's first published writings.

What I shall call Quine's *appeal to use* appears already in 1934, in Quine's first published reactions to Carnap's *Logical Syntax*. There it already marks, as I shall argue, the essential difference of emphasis that would eventually grow into Quine's rejection of Carnap's entire picture. For from the time of these first philosophical writings, Quine held that it is impossible to understand the structure of language in complete independence of an understanding of the intersubjective practice of its speakers. In this, Quine already diverged from Carnap, whose vision in *The Logical Syntax of Language* called for languages to be treated as arbitrary, rule-based calculi, uninterpreted in themselves. By understanding the significance of this difference for the development of Quine's thought, we can gain insight into both the underlying reasons for his divergence from Carnap and the larger significance of the indeterminacy result itself. For we can see how it formulates Quine's far-ranging internal critique of the structuralist picture of language that can otherwise seem, as it did for Carnap, natural and unavoidable, and that continues to determine both ordinary and philosophical thinking about language and its analysis.

I

We can begin to understand the development of Quine's understanding of language and meaning by considering its origins in his initial reaction to the work that was the basis of his first philosophical writings, Carnap's *Logical Syntax*. Conceived and written over a period of three years, and appearing in 1934, *Logical Syntax* made the bold claim that the problems of philosophy and the logic of science could be treated purely *syntactically*: that is, in terms simply of formal rules governing the interrelation and combination of symbols, without reference to their meanings.¹ Logicians had previously recognized the syntactical nature of the grammatical *formation rules* governing the possibilities of combining symbols into meaningful sentences, given a perspicuous sorting of symbols into grammatical types. In addition to this, Carnap argued, *transformation rules* governing inference or derivation of one symbol-sequence from another could also be treated as purely syntactical ones, concerning only the interrelations of symbols.² In this way, the logical analysis of language becomes the purely descriptive "mathematics and

physics of language,” the theory of the rules actually governing the inscription and manipulation of signs in a particular language, natural or artificial.³ The important notions of analyticity, deducibility, and logical contradiction can then be formulated, Carnap argues, in terms of the syntactical rules for a given language. Their formal properties, moreover, can be investigated in abstraction from any pre-existing interpretation of the *significance* of those rules.⁴

Indeed, as Carnap urged, the syntactical conception of logic had the substantial merit of exposing the arbitrariness of the logical rules constitutive of any particular language. For any particular language, logical syntax displays the rules constitutive of meaning and logic in that language; but we can always imagine, and formulate, alternative sets of rules to suit our particular needs. This shows, Carnap suggests, that the logical analysis of language need not be an investigation of the “single” logic or the “true” logic, as philosophers had formerly supposed.⁵ Instead, in logical investigations, a “principle of tolerance” reigns, allowing the logician to stipulate *arbitrary* rule-determined languages to suit particular needs. Logical investigations can henceforth be liberated from any assumption or question of correctness or incorrectness, and alternative logics and languages freely pursued. Carnap suggests that this will lead to the solution of many troubling philosophical problems, including problems in the foundations of mathematics. These disputes can henceforth be seen simply as involving alternative *proposals* for the form of a language, rather than the substantive disagreements about the nature or forms of objects or entities that they might otherwise appear to be.

The syntactical conception of language thereby gave Carnap a powerful new suggestion for resolving philosophical disagreements by treating them as resulting from disagreements about conventional language forms.⁶ At the same time, though, the conception of logic as syntax also makes possible an account of the *origin* of philosophical and metaphysical error and confusion that would prove decisive for Carnap’s ongoing critique of metaphysics. According to Carnap in *Syntax*, most metaphysical sentences in fact arise from the confusion of two ways of speaking, what Carnap calls the *formal* and the *material* modes. The sentences of logical syntax, sentences about symbols and the rules that govern them, are expressed in the formal mode. According to Carnap, all philosophical and logical claims can be written in this mode, since all logical claims in fact characterize the syntax of language. In ordinary usage, though, these formal, syntactic claims are often mistaken for claims in the material mode, or claims about objects and entities rather than about symbols. This becomes particularly problematic when such claims appear to license general ontological or metaphysical conclusions. Thus, for instance, we might be tempted to assert in the course of metaphysical theorizing that “5 is not a thing, but a number” or that “Friendship is a relation.”⁷ But the appearance of substantial theory vanishes when we transform these material-mode sentences into their formal-mode correlates, the syntactical propositions “‘5’ is not a thing-word, but a

number word” and “‘Friendship’ is a relation-word.”⁸ By transforming the material-mode philosophical claims into the formal mode, we reveal their hidden root in the conventional form of the language.

With this revealed, it becomes possible to see what might otherwise seem to be substantial philosophical claims as in fact resting on nothing more than the conventionally determined rules of a particular language. Even claims about meaning, Carnap argues, can be treated as propositions of syntax mistakenly formulated in the material mode. Rightly understood, the claim that one sentence *means* the same as another is simply the syntactical claim that the two sentences are intersubstitutable, according to the syntactical rules of the language, without altering grammatical or derivational relations to other sentences.

The body of *Logical Syntax* develops these suggestions by developing two specific artificial languages. The rules of Carnap’s “Language I” allow for the formation of meaningful terms and predicates, relations of logical inference between sentences, and a syntactic property of analyticity. The syntactical rules for Language I are themselves, as Carnap demonstrates using a method akin to Gödel’s method of arithmetizing syntax, formulable in Language I itself. Thus the formulation of logical syntax does not require any problematic hierarchy of meta-languages, since each language of a certain degree of complexity has the resources to describe its own syntax.⁹ The second formal language, Language II, is an expansion of Language I, produced by adding to it unlimited quantifiers that allow its sentences to refer to an infinite range of objects. In the context of the logical syntax project as a whole, the two specialized artificial languages have the role of simplified models. Carnap compares their introduction to the physicist’s use of abstract constructions such as the simple pendulum to help establish the underlying principles of the much more complicated natural world. Just as reflection on these abstractions can illuminate the basic principles of more complicated natural situations, Carnap suggests, the construction of simplified artificial languages like Languages I and II will illuminate the principles and rules underlying the “vastly more complicated” natural languages.¹⁰

For Carnap, it was thus essential to the possibility of logical syntax that languages, both the artificial ones he developed in the book and the actually spoken natural languages, could be treated as *formal calculi*. Such calculi are pure rule-based systems for the combination and transformation of symbols, themselves conceived as lacking any determinate individual meaning.¹¹ Examples include not only natural and artificial linguistic systems, but even rule-based systems that include nothing recognizable as symbols; for instance, the game of chess, considered as an uninterpreted system of positions and rules for the transformation of positions, is such a calculus. The procedure of considering calculi without reference to the intended meaning of their symbols, according to Carnap, ensures that what we discuss as the “meaning” of sentences can be treated “exactly,” as emerging from the explicit and definite rules of syntax, rather than defined inexactly

and ambiguously, as it would have to be if it depended on the introduction of specific meanings for words:

Up to now, in constructing a language, the procedure has usually been, first to assign a meaning to the fundamental mathematical-logical symbols, and then to consider what sentences and inferences are seen to be logically correct in accordance with this meaning. Since the assignment of meaning is expressed in words and is, in consequence, inexact, no conclusion arrived at in this way can very well be other than inexact and ambiguous. The connection will only become clear when approached from the opposite direction: let any postulates and any rules of inference be chosen arbitrarily; then this choice, whatever it may be, will determine what meaning is to be assigned to the fundamental logical symbols.¹²

Carnap's method of securing meanings by treating languages as calculi hearkens back to the Fregean idea that the meaning of a sentence can be determined purely by the logical rules that govern its relations of inference and derivation (see Chapter 2). It combines this inferentialist conception of meaning with a formalist conception, akin to Hilbert's, of the nature of a symbolic system. The synthesis makes it clear that the meaning of a sentence, at least insofar as it is relevant to logic, has nothing to do with the ideas, intuitions, or psychological associations that might be connected, in any person's consciousness, with the particular words that make it up. Rather, meaning is, from the outset, explicitly public, since the syntactical rules definitive of it are shared ones, introduced as a matter of stipulation or public agreement. The philosophical logician's task is, then, simply to consider the variety of linguistic systems, both actual and possible, and to compare the systems underlying actually existing languages with the simplified and artificial ones he may readily create.

But in requiring that syntactical rules be both completely arbitrary and wholly constitutive of the sentential meaning that will emerge from the linguistic practice using them, Carnap's view invites a certain significant tension regarding the institution, stipulation, or adoption of these rules themselves. The tension is almost evident in the first words of the foreword of *Logical Syntax*:

For nearly a century mathematicians and logicians have been striving hard to make logic an exact science. To a certain extent, their efforts have been crowned with success, inasmuch as the science of logistics has taught people how to manipulate with precision symbols and formulae which are similar in their nature to those used in mathematics. But a book on logic must contain, in addition to the formulae, an expository context which, with the assistance of the words of ordinary language, explains the formulae and the relations between them; and this context

often leaves much to be desired in the matter of clarity and exactitude. In recent years, logicians representing widely different tendencies of thought have developed more and more the point of view that in this context is contained the essential part of logic; and that the important thing is to develop an exact method for the construction of these sentences about sentences. The purpose of the present work is to give a systematic exposition of such a method, namely, of the method of "logical syntax".¹³

In the course of the actual practice of constructing artificial languages, the explicit introduction of specialized symbolism will always depend on auxiliary explanations and interpretations. These will specify the intended significance and implications of the new symbolism in a convenient, already existing language. As Carnap notes, it is typical to regard such explanatory auxiliaries, as they might occur in the introduction of special symbolism in a textbook, as strictly inessential to the symbolism thereby introduced. The explanatory auxiliaries must, in fact, be strictly inessential to the language itself, if it can be considered to be a pure logical calculus, arbitrarily chosen from among all such possible systems. But carrying out the project of logical syntax itself requires that the explanatory introduction of syntactical rules *not* be inessential in this way. For the actual stipulation or formulation of rules is not simply descriptive of, but actually constitutive of, the specialized languages created by the syntactician. And it is difficult to imagine that, as a matter of theoretical practice, the syntactical rules constitutive of a language can in fact generally be formulated without any specific intended meaning in mind.

Carnap, in other words, problematically construes the discursive explanations that accomplish the exposition of the system of syntax as both external to and necessary for our understanding of that system itself. For Carnap's requirement of arbitrariness to be satisfied, it is essential that the significance of the auxiliary explanations and interpretations be extrinsic to the significance of the rules themselves. But even where this specification takes place in the object language, it relies, in practice, on some existing understanding of the intended significance of the rules laid down. The particular rules Carnap introduces in *Syntax* for Languages I and II, for instance, are introduced with a variety of such devices and auxiliary formulations. Even the introduction of the most basic rules for the sentential connectives, ">", "~", etc., depends on the reader's antecedent understanding of the ordinary usage of the words "or", "not", etc.

This difficulty about the role of interpretation in the formulation of syntactic rules is compounded further in the case of the study of already existing natural languages. Here, the theoretician's explicit introduction of syntactic rules that purport to represent the actual syntax of the language in question can only be motivated by some antecedent sense, even if only a vague one, of the significance of these rules in terms of the actual practice

of the language's speakers.¹⁴ The theoretician seeking to describe this practice syntactically can legitimately abstract from most of the vast variety of causal and inferential linkages, evident in the actual use of a language, between individual words and their ordinary referents. But his introduction of rules meant to capture the actual logic of inference in the language can hardly portray them as completely arbitrary. The introduction of any rule that purports to re-describe the underlying logic of an already existing language will inevitably rely on discursive explanations that express that rule in antecedently familiar terms, and so will make backhanded reference to forms of speech already familiar to the language's speakers. Given Carnap's description of the analytical procedure of logical syntax, it seems impossible to avoid this reference. But given that it must occur, it is extremely difficult to preserve Carnap's commitment to the genuine arbitrariness and conventionality of all of our language systems.¹⁵

II

These considerations about the ambiguity inherent in the theoretical introduction of syntactic rules did not figure explicitly in the young Quine's first attempts to elaborate the procedures of logic, devoted as these were to a largely sympathetic exposition of Carnap's syntax project. But they are nevertheless central to the minor inflectional differences that would already distinguish these first attempts from Carnap's descriptions of the methods of syntax. The early article "Ontological Remarks on the Propositional Calculus," published in 1934 (the same year as *Syntax*), already bears witness to some slight, but significant, differences in conception between Quine and his teacher. The article poses the question of how best to construe the subject matter of the logician's symbolic, propositional calculus. Should the formulas and sentences of logic be taken to stand for extra-logical items, perhaps facts or states of affairs, or (following Frege) the truth-values True and False? Each of these solutions, Quine suggests, invites problematic metaphysical speculations. We do better, if we can, to construe the functioning of the propositional calculus without countenancing such "inferred entities" that would take us "beyond the realm of everyday uses of words."¹⁶ Accordingly, Quine outlines two distinct strategies for construing the reference of the sentences and formulas of the propositional calculus without invoking propositions. First, we may take the special truth-functional symbols of the propositional calculus simply to be *abbreviations* of ordinary English words and phrases. Thus, for instance, the special symbol " \sim " can be construed as a definitional abbreviation for "not" or "it is false that:", and the other truth-functional signs conceived similarly. The approach has the desired effect of eliminating the suggestion of any special subject-matter for the logical calculus. But as Quine notes, it also means that the propositional calculus "ceases to be a system in the usual sense."¹⁷ For if the truth-functional connectives and variable signs are simply abbreviations for natural-language

terms and sentences, the propositional calculus is itself no longer a system of actually existing elements subject to specific operations, but just a paradigm showing the use of these ordinary terms and sentences. The formation and derivation rules can help to show under what circumstances certain of these sentences are true—in particular, they show us more clearly which ordinary propositions can be considered *logical truths*—but beyond this, they have no distinct denotational objects of their own.

As Quine suggests, a second way to construe the significance of the propositional calculus without countenancing propositions is simply to construe the variable symbols of the calculus as denotations of *sentences*, grammatically well formed sequences of symbols. This is essentially Carnap's solution in *Logical Syntax*, and with it the propositional calculus again becomes a system of rules constraining the legitimate manipulation of elements, the sentences of the ordinary language. The truth-functional connectives now become signs denoting sentential *operations*, for instance the operation of appending "not:" before a sentence or concatenating two sentences and interposing the word "or." As Quine observes, on this second solution, the symbolic formulas of the propositional calculus now become, themselves, symbols *about* sentences, in particular variables which ambiguously stand for any ordinary-language sentence of a certain logical form. The theorems of the system then become, themselves, assertions to the effect that the sentences they denote are true, and the turnstile symbol " \vdash ", previously used simply as an informal tag for theoremhood, must now be construed as a *predicate* asserting the truthfulness of the sentences ambiguously denoted by the formula that follows it.

Both of these suggested Quinean solutions to the problem of the nature of the propositional calculus share the strongly anti-metaphysical attitude of Carnap's *Syntax* project in their staunch avoidance of propositional entities beyond actual sentences themselves. But it is significant that both Quinean solutions, in construing the propositional calculus as involving nothing more than actual sentences, construe the formational and inferential *rules* of the symbolic calculus as systematically dependent upon the actual patterns of sentential *use* evident in ordinary linguistic practice. For Quine, there is nothing beyond such patterns for the symbols of the propositional calculus to be about. Gone, already, is any suggestion of the logician's complete freedom in creating arbitrary symbolic calculi. For Quine, even the possibility of interpreting the transformation rules as rules of inference requires some reference to the antecedently understood significance of inference in an already-understood language. Similarly, even identifying a sentence in the calculus as a postulate or a logical truth means asserting the truthfulness of a whole class of actual object-language sentences with a certain form. This intrinsic dependence on the antecedently more-or-less understood notions of inference, derivability, and truth cannot be eliminated completely, even if the syntactical procedure may be thought to sharpen and clarify these notions somewhat.

This Quinean appeal to antecedent use in the articulation of syntactic rules develops further in his subsequent reckonings with the legacy of Carnap's project. In his 1934 "Lectures on Carnap" delivered at Harvard, Quine summarized *Logical Syntax*, presenting its main results to a non-specialist audience. But although the second and third lectures are wholly devoted to exegesis, in the first lecture Quine introduces Carnap's notion of analyticity by describing an original semantic procedure that can be followed in order to arrive at clear definitions of terms, and in order to determine the range of sentences that are analytic in a given language. To carry out the procedure for any given term, we begin by considering the set of all the sentences involving that term that are *true* in the language, or accepted on a commonsensical level by its speakers. Now, if we can lay down definitions that indeed make all such sentences true in each case, we will have arrived at an accurate definition of the term and, more generally, at a set of definitional conventions that expose the actual logical structure of the language:

Now suppose we are confronted with the job of defining K. If we can frame a definition which fulfills all the accepted K-sentences, then obviously we shall have done a perfectly satisfactory job. Nobody who was inclined to dispute the definition could point to a single respect in which the definition diverged from the accepted usage of the word K; for all accepted K-sentences would be verified.¹⁸

Were there only a relatively small number of sentences, for any given term, that both involve that term and are accepted by the speakers of the language, the definition would be easily accomplished, simply by listing the true sentences and proposing that the term should be used in just those ways and no others. But because there are, in any actual language, an infinite number of sentences including any given term, it is in general impossible to define terms in this finitary way. Rather, explicit definitional *rules* must be introduced for each particular term to subsume, as much as possible, the infinite number of true sentences involving it. Since each sentence involves more than one term, framing the rules requires making determinations as to whether a particular term appears in a context more or less materially. For instance, the term "apple" appears materially in "Every apple weighs at least two grams," but does not do so in the sentence, "Within any class of two apples there is at least one apple," since it may be replaced, in the latter sentence but not the former, with any other substantial term.¹⁹ In framing definitional rules for the language as a whole, we are likely to begin with rules for terms, such as mathematical ones, that tend to appear in many contexts non-materially or vacuously; but since no term *always* appears vacuously, our definitional procedure will always involve making decisions of relative priority. The result is a system of rules that determines certain sentences as analytic, or true by definition. But because of the inherent arbitrariness of the determination of priority, the extent of

the set of sentences deemed analytic will itself be, to a certain extent, arbitrary. In the limiting case (as Carnap had indeed already suggested), *all* of the currently accepted sentences of the language, in fact, could be rendered analytic, simply by framing the rules in such a way as to make them all come out true. But in actual practice, the decision of the best systematization for the language as a whole will presumably be guided by considerations of overall, systematic simplicity, while also aiming to respect our ordinary, intuitive notion of the distinction between formal or logical and empirical truth.

The “Lectures” therefore exhibit, as yet, no significant disagreement with Carnap over the extent and significance of the analytic/synthetic distinction for a given natural language. As for Carnap, on Quine’s procedure the determination of the set of sentences that are analytic depends on the conventional introduction of explicit, syntactical rules. And because there is some degree of arbitrariness in framing these rules, the question of whether any given sentence is analytic or synthetic does not have a completely determinate answer. But the suggested procedure of framing the definitional rules for a term by reference to the set of accepted sentences involving that term has no direct correlate in Carnap’s suggested procedure. For Carnap in *Syntax*, after all, the introduction of syntactical rules is a wholly arbitrary stipulation, having no essential reference to or dependence on the set of sentences that are actually considered true or accepted in any antecedently existing language. Even when the introduction of rules is supposed to capture, in some intuitive sense, the actual logic of an existing natural language, Carnap makes no provision for this introduction to depend on reasoning about the range of sentences already accepted or considered true. For Quine, by contrast, the introduction of particular syntactic rules is already always legitimated *only* by their ability to capture antecedent usage in the language. The rules can only purport to be syntactic rules at all, insofar as they can claim to capture the patterns of antecedent usage with reference to which they will, pragmatically, be introduced.

A year later, in 1935, Quine reformulated the material of the 1934 lectures and added some further speculations about logical truth in the influential article “Truth by Convention.” The article, again, offers no outright challenge to what Quine here calls the “linguistic doctrine” of logical truths as true by convention. But it does argue that there is no motivated way, in schematizing a language, to demarcate truths that are intuitively logical or mathematical in character from those that are intuitively empirical, in such a way as to ensure that truths in the first class are analytic and those in the second, synthetic. Quine begins the article by rehearsing the procedure introduced in the lectures for formulating the definitional rules for a language by considering the range of true statements involving a particular term. On this procedure, the introduction of a new symbol into the calculus always amounts to a definitional *abbreviation* for some antecedently understood term or phrase, in conformity with its already-understood traditional usage:

To be satisfactory in this sense a definition of the sign not only must fulfill the formal requirement of unambiguous eliminability, but must also conform to the traditional usage in question. For such conformity it is necessary and sufficient that every context of the sign which was true and every context which was false under traditional usage be construed by the definition as an abbreviation of some other statement which is correspondingly true or false under the established meanings of its signs.²⁰

Here, Quine clearly holds, even more explicitly than he had in the earlier lectures, that definitional rules can do no more than to summarize antecedently existing traditional usage. In addition, he explicitly denies that the introduction of such rules can be considered to be the result of a purely arbitrary and free decision. Even if Quine's method at this point does not demand any specific doctrinal break with the system of *Logical Syntax*, the methodological divergence from Carnap's approach is therefore already substantial. Quine has no interest in, nor even any ability to make sense of, Carnap's general constructional method, with its associated maxim of tolerance and arbitrariness in language-system creation. Instead, he insists that the inferred or derived rules, even for an artificially constructed language, can have significance only by reference to its already-understood practice.

At the end of the article, Quine poses another, even deeper problem for the "linguistic doctrine" according to which logical and mathematical truths are rendered true by convention. The problem, one of infinite regress, derives originally from Lewis Carroll, who had introduced it in the form of a dialogue between Achilles and the tortoise.²¹ On the conventionalist doctrine, in any actual language, Quine argues, there will be an infinite number of statements that we may take to be logically or analytically or conventionally true. It follows that any conventional introduction of them must rely on the introduction of a finite set of rules or paradigms that are considered to govern an infinite number of instances. Quine in fact considers, in some detail, how the tautological formulas of the propositional calculus might actually be introduced as logically true through one such set of conventions. Each of these paradigms is taken to assert the logical truth of the infinite number of particular sentences of a certain form; their adoption corresponds directly to the fixation of basic, syntactical rules for the language, as described by Carnap. The difficulty, though, is that the application of these paradigms, constitutive of logic, to generate any of the infinite number of particular sentences, itself depends on the very conventions of logic that they are supposed to formulate. The doctrine of the conventionality of logic is then rendered circular; or, if the introduction of the basic conventions is construed as giving meaning to the primitive logical signs, this meaning is rendered incommunicable:

In a word, the difficulty is that if logic is to proceed mediately from conventions, logic is needed for inferring logic from the conventions.

Alternatively, the difficulty which appears thus as a self-presupposition of doctrine can be framed as turning upon a self-presupposition of primitives. It is supposed that the if-idiom, the not-idiom, the every-idiom, and so on, mean nothing to us initially, and that we adopt the conventions . . . by way of circumscribing their meaning; and the difficulty is that communication of [these conventions] themselves depends upon free use of those very idioms which we are attempting to circumscribe, and can succeed only if we are already conversant with the idioms.²²

The problem becomes evident as soon as the rules or paradigms of logic are taken to provide information about the derivation or inference of true statements from other true statements. For instance, one of the rules that we may take to be definitive of the material conditional states that, *if* we substitute any true sentence for “p” and for “ $p \supset q$ ”, *then* the sentence substituted for “q” is true. But the application of this rule to any particular triad of sentences, say “a”, “ $a \supset b$ ”, and “b”, then itself depends on the use of the material conditional. In a similar manner, the application of any of the general rules of logic to particular cases itself depends on the rules themselves. As Quine concludes, there is no hope of taking the rules simply to be conventionally introduced, without relying on any prior understanding or basis, all at once.

In its implications for a general understanding of the basis of meaningful language, the Carroll infinite-regress problem cuts deeper than any objection Quine had hitherto formulated to Carnap’s *Syntax* project. The earlier objections, both in the “Lectures” and in the first sections of the “Truth by Convention” article, had established the arbitrariness of any particular circumscription of the rules underlying the practice of a language to include, as analytic, only “logical” and “mathematical” truths. So far as this goes, however, it would still be reasonable to suppose that there *are* such rules, implicit in practice even if not non-arbitrarily capable of explicitation, and actually operative in governing the practice of inference and reasoning for both “logico-mathematical” and “empirical” propositions. The Carroll infinite-regress objection, though, challenges the coherence even of this, more cautious, supposition. If the logical rules governing the practice of a language cannot even be made explicit without circularity, the significance of supposing them to have been implicit all along, in the practice of the language itself, begins to lapse. For any other set of rules, themselves introduced circularly, might enjoy an equal claim to represent the actual logic of the language, provided that they, too, are consistent with the facts of antecedent usage. Quine draws the conclusion near the end of the article:

It may be held that we can adopt conventions through behavior, without first announcing them in words; and that we can return and formulate our conventions verbally afterward, if we choose, when a full language is at our disposal. It may be held that the verbal formulation

of conventions is no more a prerequisite of the adoption of the conventions than the writing of a grammar is a prerequisite of speech; that explicit exposition of conventions is merely one of many important uses of a completed language. . . . It must be conceded that this account accords well with what we actually do. We discourse without first phrasing the conventions; afterwards, in writings such as this, we formulate them to fit our behavior. On the other hand it is not clear wherein an adoption of the conventions, antecedently to their formulation, consists; such behavior is difficult to distinguish from that in which conventions are disregarded. When we first agree to understand "Cambridge" as referring to Cambridge in England, failing a suffix to the contrary, and then discourse accordingly, the role of linguistic convention is intelligible; but when a convention is incapable of being communicated until after its adoption, its role is not so clear. In dropping the attributes of deliberateness and explicitness from the notion of linguistic convention we risk depriving the latter of any explanatory force and reducing it to an idle label.²³

The point, though cautiously formulated here, is a general and decisive one. The character of a language as a rule-based calculus of signs, and the consequent distinction between uses of the language that accord, and those that fail to accord, with the rules, is not evident prior to the formulation of these rules themselves. But since this formulation is more or less arbitrary within the confines of what we actually say, it cannot claim to represent any unique determination of the actual underlying logic of the language under consideration. Nor can the specification of rules claim to offer new criteria, above and beyond those we have already formulated, for the logical correctness or legitimacy of particular inferences. As Quine would begin to realize more and more clearly, the facts of what we actually utter and do are all that is available to philosophical summary or reconstruction. Beyond these facts themselves, the actual form of the "rules underlying the language" must be taken to be either arbitrarily stipulated at the moment of reconstruction or be considered to be, antecedently to this moment, substantially indeterminate.

III

Already in 1934, therefore, Quine's consideration of what is involved in understanding an existing language had led him to a conception of syntactical investigation that diverged sharply from Carnap's constructivist treatment of languages as uninterpreted calculi. The introduction of specialized notation, whether conceived as constituting an autonomous language or simply as explicating the underlying logic of an existing one, could not, for Quine, help but depend on our antecedent grasp of ordinary patterns of usage characteristic of the language we already speak. Indeed, in introducing the Carroll problem, Quine had suggested some reason to doubt that

the practice of a natural language can legitimately be treated as determined by a unique underlying set of rules at all.

Quine probably did not yet perceive the depth of the challenge this represented to Carnap's understanding of languages as calculi. The decisive break would come 16 years later, in Quine's 1950 address at the Eastern Division of the American Philosophical Association.²⁴ In "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," Quine argued for the untenability of the analytic/synthetic distinction and of the verificationist dogma of "reductionism" that he thought depended on it. The article is notorious.²⁵ Its thematic center is an accusation of circularity, directed at Carnap's suggested procedure of determining analyticity by explicitly specifying semantic rules constitutive of a language. Over the period from 1934 to 1950, Quine had gained the courage to make this attack explicit; and he had realized that by questioning the motivation of a stipulative determination of analyticity he could also call into question the coherence of the notions of necessity, intensionality, and even synonymy or sameness of meaning, which, he now realized, are interdefinable with analyticity, if they are definable at all. Any of these notions might have a clear significance, if analyticity itself does. But according to Quine, the natural strategy of demarcating the class of analytic sentences in any language by specifying semantical rules is itself empty. This is the case, Quine argues, not only for natural languages, where the underlying rules themselves might be thought to be vague and inexplicit, but even for the artificial languages that Carnap clearly had primarily in mind.²⁶

It is, of course, possible, given any selection of sentences as analytic, to specify semantical rules that determine those sentences, and just those sentences, as analytic. But this specification provides no more information, above and beyond that already present in the selection of sentences already made. In the case of an artificial language, where analyticity is already determinate, the specification of rules underlying this determinacy is empty. In the case of an existing natural language, on the other hand, the selection of a particular range of sentences as "analytic," as a subset of those generally accepted as true, is arbitrary, and cannot be rendered non-arbitrary by the subsequent or concomitant provision of explicit rules. The explicitation of rules, whether conceived of as constitutive of a fully formed artificial language or simply as an aid to the comprehension of an existing language, cannot determine what is, in the actual practice of speech, undetermined.

The appeal to pre-existing use that was already decisive, as we saw, in 1934, is explicit at various points in "Two Dogmas." Quine makes it, for instance, in the course of rejecting the interdefinability of constituent terms as a criterion for the analyticity of a sentence:

There are those who find it soothing to say that the analytic statements of the second class reduce to those of the first class, the logical truths, by *definition*; "bachelor", for example, is defined as "unmarried man". But how do we find that "bachelor" is defined as "unmarried man"?

Who defined it thus, and when? Are we to appeal to the nearest dictionary, and accept the lexicographer's formulation as law? Clearly this would be to put the cart before the horse. The lexicographer is an empirical scientist, whose business is the recording of antecedent facts; and if he glosses "bachelor" as "unmarried man" it is because of his belief that there is a relation of synonymy between those forms, implicit in general or preferred usage prior to his own work.²⁷

We have seen that, with his formulation of the Carroll problem, Quine had already suggested in 1934 that this appeal to antecedent use, indeed, tends to rule out any conception of the practice of a language as embodying any determinate set of syntactic or semantic rules at all, implicit or explicit. This point goes even further than the rejection of analyticity itself. For it implies not only that there can be no non-arbitrary sorting, by means of rules, of currently accepted sentences into analytic and synthetic but even that, more generally, the patterns of use characteristic of the acceptance and rejection of sentences in a language cannot be given any unique, explicit formulation in terms of rules at all. Nevertheless, in the period between "Two Dogmas" and his formulation of the indeterminacy result in 1960, Quine would make this second, stronger claim more and more explicitly. In 1954, Quine developed the argument of "Two Dogmas" more specifically, and brought it to bear more directly against Carnap, in "Carnap and Logical Truth". Here, he directly addresses, for the first time, Carnap's suggestion that the free propounding of an artificial language is analogous, in the sense in which it amounts to a determination of conventional rules, to the symbolic interpretation or regimentation of a natural language. The analogy, Quine maintains, fails. For the interpretation of an existing language by means of a set of rules is always, at least in part, a projection of the interpreter's assumptions rather than a neutral determination of the real structure of the language under interpretation. We can see this, Quine argues, by considering the possibility of interpreting an alien language, one initially quite unfamiliar to us. He considers the case of an imaginary logical positivist, Ixmann, who wants to clarify the logic of science by developing an artificial language purged of metaphysical claims:

Ixmann's answer consists in showing in detail how people (on Mars, say) might speak a language quite adequate to all our science but, unlike our language, incapable of expressing the alleged metaphysical issues ... Now how does our hypothetical Ixmann specify that doubly hypothetical language? By telling us, at least to the extent needed for his argument, what these Martians are to be imagined as uttering and what they are thereby to be understood to mean. Here is Carnap's familiar duality of formation rules and transformation rules (or meaning postulates), as rules of language. But these rules are part only of Ixmann's narrative machinery, not part of what he is portraying ... The threat of

fallacy lurks in the fact that Ixmann's rules are indeed arbitrary fiats, as is his whole Martian parable. The fallacy consists in confusing levels, projecting the conventional character of the rules into the story, and so misconstruing Ixmann's parable as attributing truth legislation to his hypothetical Martians.²⁸

With this, Quine's rejection of Carnap's conventionalism about the formulation of languages is complete, and the appeal to antecedent usage that this rejection depends on is fully and explicitly formulated. The introduction of a corpus of rules, even in Carnap's ideal case of the postulation of a wholly new language meant to show the emptiness of metaphysical questions concerning existence, can itself only be conceived as a projection onto the existing language under consideration. It would be a confusion of levels, Quine suggests, to consider the corpus of rules to *accurately* represent the real structure of the language as it is practiced, even when the language under consideration is just an imaginary one. The only intelligible criterion for the accuracy of an explanation of such a language, whether real or imaginary, is just that it provide an interpretation of its sentences in *our* language: that is, that we be able to translate each sentence of the language under consideration into a sentence of like truth-value in our familiar one. If a conventionally introduced corpus of rules—what Quine would later call a “translation manual”—can do this, it is adequate in every real respect. The purport of any such corpus to represent real distinctions, above and beyond the facts about which sentences are accepted as true and which rejected as false, of (for instance) analyticity or syntheticity, must be rejected as empty.

IV

When, in 1937, Carnap offered his first published response to Quine's incipient criticism of conventionalism, he reacted with tolerance, apparently perceiving in Quine's suggestions no deep challenge to his own views. In *Foundations of Logic and Mathematics*, Carnap reiterated the position of *Syntax* with some minor modifications. Here he goes on to consider directly, in all but explicit reply to Quine, the question of whether logic is a matter of convention. As in *Syntax*, to assert the conventionality of logic simply means, for Carnap, to deny that there is “a distinction between objectively right and objectively wrong systems” of logical rules.²⁹ And this assertion, Carnap continues to maintain, must be upheld, *provided* we begin with the free stipulation of uninterpreted calculi, allowing the interpretation and meaning to be determined later. Carnap next reacted to Quine's attacks in print two decades later, in the “Library of Living Philosophers” volume devoted to his work, a volume that also contained Quine's “Carnap and Logical Truth.” In the brief response, Carnap again expressed puzzlement about the extent and intended force of Quine's attack. In particular, he

failed to see the reason for Quine's apparent requirements, in "Two Dogmas" and "Carnap and Logical Truth," that "analyticity" be given a general clarification, applicable to any arbitrary language, and that this clarification take the form of an empirical, "behavioristic" criterion. Carnap was especially puzzled in that he could find no argument, in Quine's writings, to the effect that his actually suggested semantic and syntactic rules were not "exact and unobjectionable."³⁰

In fact it is not surprising, given the extent to which Quine's points about the arbitrariness of the stipulation of rules could thus be seem to be sympathetically absorbed by Carnap's conventionalist doctrine, that Carnap never really saw Quine's attack as having any great depth. But there was nevertheless a crucial difference in outlook and philosophical approach between the two philosophers, one that, as we have seen, appeared already in Quine's first writings on Carnap. As we have seen, Quine always took it that the interpretation of any specialized logical notation, even one introduced as an autonomous, artificial language, would depend on the existing patterns of usage and agreed-upon understandings of terms and sentences in an already-understood language. Thus what was, for Carnap, only an optional starting point—the pre-existing meanings of the terms and sentences that explain a logical calculus—was for Quine essential to the logical calculus having any interpretation at all.

Noting the extent to which Quine's explicit results need not actually have been threatening to Carnap's project, and the extent to which that project itself has subsequently been misunderstood, some recent commentary on the Quine/Carnap debate has attempted a partial rehabilitation of Carnap's picture against what have elsewhere been taken to be Quine's devastating criticisms. For instance, Creath (1987) argues that Quine's arguments against conventionalism in "Truth by Convention" and "Carnap and Logical Truth" fail to attack any view that Carnap ever actually held.³¹ Along similar lines, Ebbs (1997) argues that Quine's attacks on conventionalism miss the pragmatic and programmatic spirit of Carnap's suggestion that language frameworks be freely chosen. In particular, Carnap's picture requires no metaphysically or epistemologically problematic picture of languages, and the logical truths within, them, as instituted or constituted by conventional, stipulative acts.³² All that is required is what Ebbs calls Carnap's "motivating insight": that in order to settle philosophical and metaphysical disputes, we must explicitly "state rules for the use of linguistic expressions."³³

But the rehabilitation of Carnap's view can be, at best, partial. For although Quine did often present his attacks as bearing against a more general view than the one that Carnap actually held, his appeal to antecedent use provides, as we have seen, reason for doubting the wide freedom of choice that, according to the position Carnap actually did hold, the logician must enjoy. For it was a requirement for the cogency of Carnap's view (his actual one as much as the other versions of conventionalism that

Quine sometimes tended to attribute to him) that the logician's freedom in creating new logical systems be *complete*: that, in other words, languages could reasonably be viewed as pure symbolic calculi, stipulated simply by laying down syntactical rules, without constraint by antecedently understood meanings. By contrast, Quine's consideration of the role of antecedent use in providing an interpretation for whatever sign system we might create led him, from the start of his engagement with Carnap's views, to doubt this key premise.

Ebbs argues further that the Carroll problem of infinite regress does not threaten Carnap's view of linguistic stipulation, since investigators are already, in virtue of sharing a language, in a position to agree upon and take for granted some rules of inference, which they will then presuppose in determining and agreeing upon more specialized rules for the particular domain in need of clarification. But this begs the question against Quine by assuming that what is shared among native speakers of a natural language, as a presupposition for the possibility of communication, is *already* comprehensible as a set of agreed-upon rules, explicit or implicit. Though it is certainly true that investigators into a special area of language must, in some sense, antecedently share a language if they are able to communicate at all, it is far from obvious that this sharing must amount to agreement upon any determinate set of logical or inferential rules, such as could help to block the regress.

One significant obstacle, indeed, to understanding the depth and force of Quine's attack against Carnap is that there is a great tendency to take the picture of language that Carnap held as inevitable or obviously true. It can seem simply obvious that if speakers share a language, their agreement simply in speaking it must amount to agreement on some corpus of rules, explicit or implicit, in principle capable of formulation and explication. The impression that this much is obvious may explain, to some extent, the tendency of commentators to understand Quine to be attacking a specific view of the institution or significance of the rules constitutive of language, a view that Carnap never held, and then to object that (as Carnap himself appears to have thought) the attack misses its mark. But in fact the scope of Quine's attack goes much deeper, to the extent of challenging the seemingly obvious assumption that language must be explicable as a rule-based calculus itself.

By the time he formulated the parable of Ixmann, Quine understood clearly that any interpretation of the actual rules supposed to be constitutive of a language could only amount to the projection of interpretive assumptions, at home in the interpreter's language, onto the language under interpretation. It is implicit in this, and in the motivation of most of Quine's various attacks on versions of conventionalism, that there is no non-arbitrary way to describe a language as a rule-bound calculus that is both consistent with, and wholly determined by, the actual use and practice of that language. In this sense, the force of Quine's attack is not even limited to

conventionalist pictures of the adoption of the rules supposed to govern language; it holds force against any picture, conventionalist or not, that supposes that language is explicable in terms of such rules at all.³⁴ Though Quine may never have put the point just this way, his attack on Carnap therefore called into question the exceedingly general notion of logical, linguistic, syntactic or semantic rules as constitutive or explanatory of a language. Such rules, if the upshot of Quine's critique is right, can only be stipulated against the presupposed background of the understood meanings of terms in an already-existing language, a background which itself is not capable of explicitation as a system of rules (on pain of a Carroll-style regress).

V

As we have seen, Quine's attacks on Carnap, beginning in 1934, developed from the innocent-seeming thought that the meanings of special linguistic symbols and rules could only be interpreted against the backdrop of an already-understood language. But although he always appealed in this way to antecedent use, and understood this as something other than an explicit corpus of rules, it was not always clear what, exactly, was the object of this appeal. It was this that the model of radical translation, in its description of the limits and scope of the range of facts accessible to an interpreter with no antecedent knowledge of the language under interpretation, attempted to make maximally clear. With the model, Quine found, as well, a way to express the surprising upshot of his critique of Carnap as a general result about language and meaning, the indeterminacy of translation.

The descriptive set-up of the scenario of radical translation, which Quine first explicitly formulated in the second chapter of *Word and Object*, is familiar enough to require only a brief rehearsal. In radical translation, a translator is charged with the task of making sense of a wholly unfamiliar language, unguided by clues of shared or cognate word forms or cultural cues.³⁵ The attempt will culminate, if it is successful, in the production of a *translation manual* systematically linking sentences of the foreign language with sentences in the translator's own language, or providing systematic, recursive recipes for such linkages.³⁶ The evidence on which the interpreter must depend in arriving at a systematic translation is limited to what she can observe of the natives' speech behavior, including their tendencies to use various utterances in the presence of various observable phenomena and events, and the natives' responses of assent or dissent, when queried as to the use of a particular sentence in a given environmental situation.³⁷ From this meager evidentiary base, meant nevertheless to capture all of the evidence that could, in principle, be accessible in radical translation, the interpreter must construct a systematic translation of each native sentence into a sentence of his familiar language. The result, which Quine suggests at the beginning of the chapter, is that translation is systematically indeterminate. For, as a detailed appeal to the radical translation scenario will show:

manuals for translating one language into another can be set up in divergent ways, all compatible with the totality of speech dispositions, yet incompatible with one another. In countless places they will diverge in giving, as their respective translations of a sentence of the one language, sentences of the other language which stand to each other in no plausible sort of equivalence however loose.³⁸

Before evaluating the indeterminacy result, it is important to understand the underlying motivational assumptions of the radical translation scenario itself. Since Quine wrote, it has been standard in the interpretive literature to object to the radical translation scenario on the ground that it restricts the interpreter artificially by placing tendentious and unmotivated limitations on the form of the evidence to which he may have access. If the evidence is so restricted, commentators have argued, the indeterminacy result follows trivially, but fails to establish anything significant about the nature of meaning or language overall. The impression of an unmotivated and artificial limitation on evidence, indeed, is strengthened by Quine's consistent tendency to describe the totality of facts available to the interpreter—and indeed all the facts that there are about the use of the language—in a physicalist, behaviorist language of stimuli and responses.³⁹ But in fact, as we are now in a position to see, the impression that the radical translation scenario depends on behaviorism is, though perhaps fostered by Quine's own rhetoric, quite superficial.⁴⁰ For its significance is the same as that of the appeal to use that Quine had consistently presupposed: that any interpretation of a language presupposes, and cannot go beyond, the facts of antecedent usage in the practice of that language.

Though sometimes couched in its idioms, this appeal itself has no essential dependence on behaviorism. Rather, it simply formulates methodologically the thought that the interpreter who does not already know a language can only avail himself of such facts as he might reasonably be thought, in this position, to have access to. If we are to make sense of the interpretation of a language as comprising a set of rules by means of which we can understand it (whether an explanatory calculus, as for Carnap, or a translation manual, as for Quine), it is important that the statement of the facts available at the outset not include any information about any logical, deductive, or grammatical rules that will later on be used to explain these antecedently observable facts. In this sense, the interpreter's evidentiary restriction involves nothing more than a limitation to what must, on any account, be considered to be accessible to a potential interpreter, independently of the interpretation he will provide. This limitation, significantly, involves no prejudicial or tendentious limitation to one or another type of facts (for instance facts "about behavior" or "expressible in physical terms"). Indeed, anything that could, in principle, be observed by an interpreter innocent of the interpreted language can be included in the evidentiary base. The requirement is restrictive only in prohibiting a circular

presupposition of an interpretation, prior to any interpretation actually being formulated.⁴¹

The force of the indeterminacy result is not that, then, the facts about meaning are indeterminate with respect to some other, more restricted set of facts; but, rather, that for any uninterpreted fact (be it about a subject's behavior, his inner constitution, or whatever) there is an open question about its meaning that can only be answered by some interpretation or other.⁴² The result follows readily from reflection about the extent to which the knowledge embodied by a translation manual, and requisite for providing an interpretation of a language as a whole, must systematically outrun anything directly required by the totality of facts antecedently available to an interpreter. The point, as Quine had already suggested in his attack on Carnap, is that any explicative introduction of rules specifying the form of a language goes significantly beyond what can be considered to be genuinely inherent in that language itself. The slack is taken up, in interpretive practice, by what Quine calls "analytical hypotheses," systematic assumptions not directly required by any fact of linguistic practice, but stipulated in order to achieve maximum simplicity and charity in interpretation.⁴³ But because the analytical hypotheses are not uniquely determined by any objective facts of the matter, there is significant room for variability and arbitrariness in their stipulation. The result is that two translation manuals of a single language into another one can differ and disagree to a large extent, while still legitimately claiming to embody equally all the genuine facts about the underlying language.

Quine's exposition of the indeterminacy thesis proceeds by considering, in detail, the procedure that a radical interpreter might follow in arriving at a systematic interpretation of a language, meanwhile showing the particular points at which indeterminacy tends to arise. The interpreter will begin with sentences that are assented to only momentarily or for a short time upon the presentation of a stimulus. Quine calls these "occasion sentences"; his classic example of this is the one-word sentence "Gavagai," which prompts assent upon the presentation of a rabbit. Even here, with the sentences most directly keyed to present stimulations, indeterminacy threatens. For instance, it is impossible to exclude the possibility that the native occasion sentence refers at least in part to another object, seen by the native on a particular occasion but missed by the interpreter. More generally, the native's assent or dissent to a prompted occasion sentence may depend as much upon collateral information held by the native as upon the presence of the stimulus itself.⁴⁴ The possible role of collateral information may be minimized, to some extent, by comparing different speakers of the language in point of their willingness to assent to various observation sentences. But since significant collateral information may be shared by all competent speakers of a language, it is never possible completely to factor out the contribution it makes to the observable facts, or to eliminate the translational indeterminacy that results.

Of course, the role of collateral information, and the extent of the resulting indeterminacy, grows larger when the translator moves from occasion sentences keyed as directly as possible to present stimuli to more abstract sentences, held true not only under particular, distinct conditions of stimulation but more enduringly or abstractly. And even if the problem of collateral information could be solved in some unique way, indeterminacy would continue to threaten under another heading, what Quine would later call the “inscrutability of reference.”⁴⁵ The problem is that the determination of a translation, even for the basic designative terms of simple occasion sentences, will depend on some systematic sense of the overriding categorical structure of the language as a whole, of its most basic means of sorting individuals into ontological types. This structure is itself undetermined by anything that the translator can observe, antecedent to interpretation. Thus, for instance, even if “Gavagai” is successfully tied to presently evident rabbits, there is nothing in this observational tie to require that “Gavagai” actually refers to rabbits (individuated as *we* would individuate them); it may, for all we know, refer merely to temporal stages of more enduring processes. Or it may refer to what is conceived as a part of a single, spatio-temporally distinct particular.⁴⁶ These aberrant possibilities seem unusual from our perspective; but there is nothing in the interpreter’s fund of evidence to exclude them. And if they may, indeed, obtain, then the interpreter’s evidence does not suffice to establish that the native’s term “Gavagai” and our term “rabbit” are coextensive, even if the former term is used by the natives under every circumstance in which we would use the latter.

It follows that, beyond a core of observation sentences whose translation is maximally determinate, there is a wide range of sentences which may equally well be translated in any of various, clearly different ways. No matter what types or categories of facts are introduced into the observational base, there is no way to minimize the range of indeterminacy, without circularly presupposing the interpretation which it is the radical interpreter’s task to provide. But because the radical translation scenario models our ordinary capacity to understand meaning, it follows that there must be an ineliminable indeterminacy in the very meanings of our ordinarily understood sentences and terms. Though the fiction of an interpreter of a wholly alien language is used to expound the result, the model of radical translation also captures, according to Quine, the epistemic conditions each of us are under in coming to understand utterances in our own language, and the indeterminacy result must also be taken to hold for it. As Quine puts it elsewhere, “radical translation begins at home.”⁴⁷ Having admitted that indeterminacy affects any intelligible notion of interlinguistic sameness of meaning, or synonymy, there is no way to prevent it from affecting the intralinguistic notion as well.⁴⁸ It follows that, on any intelligible sense of “meaning,” two speakers may speak and understand the same language, and yet diverge radically in the meanings they associate with its sentences.⁴⁹

The result, thus put, has an air of extreme paradox. If it is correct, it seems to follow that the vast majority of the sentences that we use everyday, in ordinary language, have no determinate meaning. When I use any one of these sentences, even one as plain as “there is a rabbit,” there is no determinate fact of the matter about what I mean. And this does not result simply from giving “meaning” a specialized or philosophically loaded sense; Quine’s claim is that indeterminacy of meaning arises for *any* coherent notion of linguistic meaning, no matter how broad or general.

Perhaps because of its extreme air of paradox, commentators responding to the indeterminacy result have often attempted to find grounds, for instance in considerations overlooked by Quine about the conditions which must be satisfied for a speaker to master a language, on which it is possible to argue that the actual extent of indeterminacy of meaning, in the real practice of a language, is in fact significantly less than Quine suggests, or perhaps actually nonexistent.⁵⁰ But by seeing the real sources of the indeterminacy result in Quine’s sustained critique of the picture of languages as calculi, we can fully accept the result while at the same time perceiving the larger implications of the paradox it articulates. To a large extent, the paradoxicality of the result arises from the seeming poorness of its fit with our ordinary intuitions about the use of language. When somebody utters a sentence in my own language and I take myself to understand it, I generally have no sense of arbitrarily selecting one meaning or interpretation from a variety of systematically different possibilities. Nor does the abstract possibility of alternative translation manuals seem to pose any practical obstacle to the ordinary practice of communicating and understanding meanings. Indeed, there seems to be an obvious sense in which, in uttering a familiar English sentence meaningfully, I must, as a competent speaker of English, be said to understand and be capable of communicating its meaning.⁵¹ Indeterminacy thus seems to have no effect on ordinary linguistic practice; it is perfectly possible to say something, and mean something determinate by it, without having any particular systematic translation manual in mind at all. It can seem difficult or impossible to square these obvious features of the phenomenology of ordinary language with the claim that there is, when I utter a normal, declarative sentence, no genuine fact of the matter about what I mean. But it is this claim that the indeterminacy result implies; and hence it can seem that the only reasonable way to react to it is to find hitherto unnoticed grounds, implicit in our understanding of linguistic practice, for denying that the result could be true.

But we can put the result in a different perspective by placing it against the backdrop of Quine’s longstanding appeal to antecedent use, and reflecting on the way in which this appeal provided grounds for his emerging critique of Carnap’s picture of languages as calculi. For seen against this backdrop, the indeterminacy of meaning is, in effect, the product of two separate and somewhat (though not completely) isolable factors. One of these factors is the totality of facts about the ordinary practice of a language, captured in

Quine's formulation as the totality of facts antecedently accessible to the interpreter. But another factor, equally crucial to the result, is introduced by the attempt to schematize or specify meanings by formulating them explicitly in a translation manual. That meanings so specified must systematically outstrip any determinacy actually present in the facts they purport to represent and systematize is a key thought of Quine's, from early in his dialogue with Carnap. But this point implies no threat to the evident determinacy of these facts in themselves. If speakers are confined to the realm of an unreflective linguistic practice, and *debarred wholly from reflecting about any systematic principles or rules underlying their use of language*, no troubling impression of indeterminacy need arise. Ordinary communication proceeds untroubled, without any need to work out or specify an entire interpretation or translation.⁵² The indeterminacy only emerges as part of the reflective practice of explicating and specifying meanings, a practice that the radical translator's activity of translation explicitly models. It is only within the ambit of this general reflection that the possibility emerges of translating one and the same utterance in two radically different ways. Without it, the fact of indeterminacy remains, but it need not be considered to introduce anything paradoxical into the phenomenology of ordinary, unreflective practice.

But in practice, it will, of course, be impossible to make this a clean separation. As we saw in the last chapter, the possibility of systematic reflection about the ground and basis for linguistic meaning is inscribed in a language as soon as it contains the predicate "means" itself. Indeed, as soon as a language includes expressions for such notions as "meaning," "truth" and "language" the reflective activity of explicitation that would culminate in a formal calculus or translation manual has already implicitly begun. A language purged of these expressions, and hence debarred from the possibility of systematic reflection on the basis of linguistic meaning, would scarcely be recognizable as a (human) language at all.⁵³ To construe the indeterminacy result as an artifact of reflection on the form of a language is not, then, to limit its significance to the abstract, theoretical activity of linguists and philosophers. In the ordinary, everyday practice of clarifying and reflecting on meanings, a practice which presupposes the concepts which, if fully explicated, would yield a systematic understanding of the structure of the language as a whole, indeterminacy and conflicting interpretations may arise at any point. But since it can be taken to be essential to human conversation that it always involve at least the possibility of raising questions of meaning, or of interpreting and criticizing what has been said with reference to an understanding of a language as a whole, this practice is none other than ordinary interlocution. Its ambiguities and indeterminacies are those of language as such, anywhere and everywhere it plays a role in human relations.

In interpreting the indeterminacy result as arising from the specific instabilities of a structuralist picture of language such as Carnap's, moreover, it is important not to lose sight of the depth of the sources of this picture in our everyday thinking about language, and the genuine difficulty of resisting it.

In the course of any systematic attempt to reflect about language as a practice it seems just obvious that this practice must, on some level of description, be guided by systematic rules of grammar and inference that can, at least in principle, be recovered by theoretical reflection. This seemingly obvious assumption forms a large part of the basis of projects, throughout the analytic tradition, that see themselves as clarifying or making explicit the underlying logical, semantic, grammatical, or pragmatic form of language. Carnap himself never questioned it, always assuming (despite the large amount of room his conventionalism allowed for arbitrariness and stipulation in the reconstruction of a language) that the explication of a language, or an area of a language, in terms of a specialized calculus could genuinely clarify and account for real, underlying relations of justification and inference within that language.

The picture of language as a calculus cuts so deeply in ordinary and philosophical thinking, indeed, that Quine himself, despite his sustained critique of it, also does not seem to completely escape its influence. Other regions of his thought, less closely connected to the dialogue with Carnap, tend to reinstate it, at least in part; and its vestigial influence on Quine's thinking may explain why he never posed the indeterminacy result explicitly and specifically as a critique of it. For instance, Quine held, beginning in *Word and Object*, that a logical "regimentation" of specific regions of language could clarify their inferential structure and ontological commitments.⁵⁴ The famous holist picture of language as an interconnected "web of belief," surrounded at the outer perimeter by experience, with which he ends "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," seems to suggest that the total state of language, diachronically revisable and changeable though it may be, could be portrayed, at least at any specific moment, by a determinate calculus of rules relating currently accepted propositions, both to each other and, holistically, to the empirical world. And the naturalist vision of epistemology that he celebrated beginning with "Epistemology Naturalized" can seem to suggest that general principles of the grammatical and inferential practice of a language could be determined purely empirically by means of reflection about the physiological route from sense-stimulation to the fixation of beliefs and their expression in behavior.⁵⁵ In each of these cases, the appeal to some notion of language as a calculus is less complete and explicit than Carnap's conception, but it remains in the background nonetheless. These vestigial remnants of the picture of language as a calculus need not imperil the more general recognition that we have located in Quine's critique of Carnap, to the effect that it is impossible to foreclose the indeterminacy that is a necessary result, once we conceive of language as a calculus. But their seeming irresistibility, as soon as systematic thinking about language begins, can start to explain why Quine himself never formulated this general recognition in these explicit terms.

More broadly, by understanding how Quine came to articulate a fundamental criticism of the picture of languages as calculi on the basis of his

ongoing appeal to use, we can derive a striking general lesson about the role of the interrelated notions of rules, use, and practice in our ordinary understanding of language. It is an essential part of this understanding that words and expressions are describable as similar, identical or different in meaning, and that this description, when offered, could be underwritten by a description of similarities, identities, or differences in the regularities of use. The most radical and surprising implication of Quine's indeterminacy thesis is that this assumption of regularity is ungrounded in anything we could discern as a description of the facts. The set of assumptions of the determinacy and identity of meanings that make possible not only our ordinary reflection on meaning but the ordinary conversations in which this reflection plays an essential part stand revealed, then, as mythologies. Nevertheless they remain operative in what we regularly grasp as our regular "practice" of using language, and continue to essentially determine what we do and say within it. As soon as we begin to reflect on our practice of using words as such, the possibility of describing meanings as the "same" or "different" emerges as an essential part of this practice; but the effect of Quine's result is to show that nothing describable as part of this practice grounds this possibility of determining sameness and difference of meaning.

At an earlier stage of its pursuit, the analytic tradition's reflection on language had been explicitly directed against the mythology of "ideas" or psychological items as the underlying basis for judgments of identity or difference of meaning. With Quine's indeterminacy result, this reflection reaches its most radical conclusion. In the more radical application that Quine's indeterminacy result exemplifies, the critique bears not only against the earlier psychologistic conception but also against the pervasive mythology of meaning as grounded in regularly describable "usage" as well. It remains that the assumption of a substantial basis, in practice, for judgments of the identity and difference of meaning play a pervasive and practically ineliminable role in the simplest situations of intersubjective life. The startling effect of Quine's result is to show the impossibility of any attempt to discharge this assumption by reference to the facts of use. If my assumption that an interlocutor will go on using a word in the "the same way" I do, or that he means the same thing with his utterances or inscriptions that I would mean in using auditorially or lexicographically similar tokens, indeed has a basis to which I can appeal, this basis is (as we might put it) nothing other than the fact that we share a language; and this fact is not further explicable in terms of facts of linguistic usage or reference more primitive or basic than it itself. This fact grounds every possibility of human linguistic communication, and of the application of linguistic criticism to the circumstances and practices of human life. But within the systematic attempt, engendered already with the first word of language's reflection on itself, to comprehend its system and schematize its principles, it emerges as itself groundless, the essentially elusive core of human mutuality itself.

Part III

Critical outcomes

Introductory

From the aporia of structure to the critique of practice

The analytic tradition's inquiry into the structure of language, throughout the course of its itinerary, has repeatedly taken up the question of the relationship of language to its everyday use, practice or employment. This inquiry has not yielded any consistent or complete positive theory of this relationship. But its most significant implication might be its ability to continue, and re-inscribe, the traditional *critique of reason* on the indeterminate ground of the everyday relationship of language to the life of the being that speaks. For with its ongoing consideration of the structure of language, the analytic tradition has, as we have seen, also sought to understand how language structures the possibilities of a human life. In seeking a description of the rules and regularities that would determine the extent and nature of the possible meaningfulness of signs, and so fix the bounds of linguistic sense, it has also sought to elucidate what we can understand or appreciate in the words or utterances of another, what we can take as a reason for an action or an explanation of its sense, what we can see as a project to be shared or contested, a way of life to be endorsed or refused.¹ The desire for the clarification of meaning that underlies this inquiry is an ordinary one, marked already in the most mundane requests for clarification, the most everyday questions of shared meaning. But in its detailed development in the analytic tradition, its "object" is the same as that which philosophical thought has long sought to grasp as *logos*, the form of the meaning of words as well as the linguistic reason their everyday practice embodies. Historical reflection on the itinerary of the tradition's encounter with this problematic object suggests both a more comprehensive sense of the significance of its most innovative methods and a more exact placement of them in a broader geography of critical thought.

The analytic tradition's inquiry into language, in most of its historical forms, looks toward the completion of a comprehensive theoretical or descriptive understanding of the possibility of linguistic meaning. Most often, this takes the form of the search for a descriptive overview or systematic clarification of the rules or regularities conceived as constitutive of language and its possibilities of use. As we have seen over the last several chapters, however, this quest for understanding repeatedly succumbs to inherent ambiguities and instabilities, grounded in the essential ambiguities of the structuralist

picture of language itself. The quest is open to criticism on the basis of an expanded conception of the kinds of explanation, or intelligibility, we may wish from a theoretical “account” of language. But it is also clear that the ambiguities it evinces are already present, if only in a vague and inarticulate way, in the ordinary language that it aims to theorize. As we have seen, in particular in relation to Quine, these ambiguities are indeed present as soon as language can speak of itself, as soon as there are words for its capacity to mean anything, and thus as soon as the meaning of words, their bearing on our lives, becomes a topic for human conversation at all.

Thus it is that, according to what might well be considered one of the most consistent results of the tradition, linguistic reason, in its everyday employment, poses certain questions that are unavoidable for it, but at the same time cannot be answered univocally by the elucidation of logical or grammatical structure. The situation is closely reminiscent of that described by the famous first lines of the first edition of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*:

Human reason has this peculiar fate that in one species of its knowledge it is burdened by questions which, as prescribed by the very nature of reason itself, it is not able to ignore, but which, as transcending all its powers, it is also not able to answer.²

Indeed, as I shall argue in this part, like the Kantian project which responds to a similar exigency of reason, the analytic inquiry can be seen as performing a complex critique of linguistic meaning itself on the ambiguous ground of its relationship to human life. The critique effectively challenges the underlying ideological bases of some of the most prevalent social practices of modernity by revealing their complex relation to the forms of language and assumptions about meaning that support them.

At the beginning of the analytic tradition, Kant’s critique of reason provided both a model and an inspiration for practitioners of the newly developed methods of logical and grammatical analysis. This influence was felt not only by philosophers like Carnap and other members of the Vienna Circle (whose training and background in the Neo-Kantianism of Cohen, Natorp and Rickert played a decisive role in determining the Circle’s project) but just as much by the young Wittgenstein, who saw in the new methods of analysis pioneered by Frege and Russell the possibility of conceiving of all philosophy as linguistic critique:

All philosophy is a “critique of language” (though not in Mauthner’s sense). It was Russell who performed the service of showing that the apparent logical form of a proposition need not be its real one.³

Like Kant’s own project, the methods of this new form of linguistic critique would seek to elucidate and demonstrate the necessary forms of the representation of facts, and thereby to gain an understanding of their a priori

conditions and the limits of their possibilities. But the definitive inspiration of the new practice of critique was that this form could be grasped as *logical* or *linguistic* one, and so could be clarified through the newly developed methods of analysis. The Russellian theory of descriptions itself was a limited case, bearing only on the question of the actual significance of a certain class of apparently referring propositions, and eventually to be undermined by its own set of seeming counter-examples. But for Wittgenstein as well as other early analytic philosophers, it provided an essential early demonstration of the bearing of the methods of analysis on the *clarification* of language, the illumination of its “real” possibilities of meaning over against the tendency of ordinary language to obscure or falsely assimilate these forms. Such was the singularity of Wittgenstein’s insight, or the specificity of his historical position, that he could see philosophy’s problems as entirely and universally grounded in such linguistic obscurities and illusions. And such was the audacity of his vision of language that he could declare these problems universally resolved by their critique.⁴

At first, the critique of language meant the drawing of a critical line, within the totality of language itself, between the meaningful propositions of scientific or objective description and those that (though they might serve to express a mood or feeling) lacked meaning in this sense. From the beginning, though, the critical practice that would delimit linguistic sense by clarifying the real or genuine forms of meaning encountered the question of the methodological basis of its own claim to enact this delimitation. Thus structuralism was faced with the further critical question of the ground of its own defining commitments. And the philosophical reflection that took up this question as the question of linguistic signs to their ordinary use also took up the deeper critical inquiry to which it led.

The results of this inquiry—in particular, as we have seen, those of the Sellars, Quine, and the later Wittgenstein—tended to problematize what we may assume about our ordinary relationship to “meaning” by calling into question the structuralist model that earlier projects had uncritically presupposed. In different ways, each of these projects articulated a fundamental instability that troubles the structuralist attempt to characterize linguistic meaning by describing its basis in rules of use. In the case of Wittgenstein’s consideration of rule-following in particular, this instability defines a fundamental *aporia* or gap between what the structuralist picture envisions as rules and what is involved in applying or following them in the varied circumstances of a human life. The gap is uncrossable by any theoretical explanation as long as linguistic meaning is conceived in structuralist terms, since any such conception leads to the paradox of *PI* 201. Its diagnosis and criticism is to make way for an alternative way of understanding what is involved in following a rule, a way that expresses itself in what we call “following a rule,” or “going against it,” from “case to case” of actual “use.”⁵

At *PI* 217, Wittgenstein asks, in an interlocutory voice, “How am I able to obey a rule?” The question, as I shall attempt to document in this part of

the book, can also be seen as *the* central question of those forms of contemporary social, political, and cultural critique that take up the question of our relationship to linguistic reason and the forms of life and practice determined by this relationship. Within these forms of life and practice, the most normal form of the determination of action is its being in accord with one or another symbolically formulable rule. Here, the *force of reason*—what motivates or compels us to choose the better action rather than the worse, to accept the claim that is best justified by the evidence or follow the course of action that will lead to the best outcome—is also typically comprehensible as the justification of action by rules that can be stated and discussed, explicated and evaluated. In the course of such discussion, I may present my action as justified by reference to one or another cited rule; but I may also ask the question of what in the cited rule itself demands or even suggests my particular action, of how I should understand the ultimate basis of its (actual or “normative”) force in determining what I do. The question, in its general form, is the same as the question of linguistic reason’s authority, the relevance of its claims to the pursuit of a linguistic life. It formulates, in distinctively linguistic mode, one of the most central questions of the Kantian critique of reason itself.⁶

Wittgenstein’s immediate response to the interlocutor, without answering the question, expresses a pervasive sense that such answers may fail to do what we expect of them, may fail ultimately to place the distinctive force of reason on any more basic foundation than it already has:

if this is not a question about causes, then it is about the justification for my following the rule in the way I do.

If I have exhausted the justifications I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: “This is simply what I do.”⁷

The paradox of *PI* 201 articulates the gap between a rule and its application that makes any further description of our practices—any further description of what we do—idle in answering the question of the ultimate ground of rational force. It thus demonstrates a nullity at the center of structural reason’s claim to force over a life responsive to its dictates.

Like the more formal results of Gödel and Tarski before them, the results of Sellars, Wittgenstein, and Quine demonstrate the necessary failure of a natural and plausible theoretical project, in this case the project of a total structuralist explanation of linguistic meaning. And if, in the larger context of the history of the analytic tradition, these results were only comprehensible as the outcomes of a positive, theoretical explanatory project (one whose ambition, for instance, were simply to contribute to a growing fund of scientific or empirical knowledge about language) they would indeed amount only to failures, and their repeated occurrence would suggest that the entire project from which they arose be abandoned or at least seriously reconsidered. But if seen within the broader context of the critical methods

that the tradition has practiced since its inception, they drive toward a very different possibility, one that could ensure the continuance rather than the abandonment of the reflective project they represent. For they could be the basis of an explicit renewal of the analytic tradition's ongoing critical consideration of our access to linguistic meaning, of the contours of its inherent possibilities and the threat of its failures, and of the implications of the determinate pursuit of its structure for our understanding of its role in the life of the being that speaks.

Stanley Cavell gives an apt sense of the cultural bearing of this critique, as it appears in the texts of the late Wittgenstein:

That the justifications and explanation we give of our language and conduct, that our ways of trying to intellectualize our lives, do not really satisfy us, is what, as I read him, Wittgenstein wishes us above all to grasp. This is what his "methods" are designed to get us to see. What directly falls under his criticism are not the results of philosophical argument but those unnoticed turns of mind, casts of phrase, which comprise what intellectual historians call "climates of opinion," or "cultural style", and which, unnoticed and therefore unassessed, defend conclusions from direct access—fragments, as it were, of our critical super-egos which one generation passes to the next along with, perhaps as the price of, its positive and permanent achievements.⁸

Like an earlier epoch of enlightenment thought, the analytic critique of language aims, in one of its most prominent historical modes, at the identification of sources of *mythology*, and so culminates in the *demystification* of the pictures of human life they impose and diagnosis of the false consciousness that accompanies them.⁹ One of its first and still most significant accomplishments, for instance, was to provide linguistic grounds for challenging the longstanding picture of the content of thought as consisting in the conscious processes of a closed, centered subjectivity. The critique of psychologism that Wittgenstein inherited from Frege exposed this picture to its own fatal failure to account for the meaningfulness of language that is presupposed by it. Psychologism, like others of the various pictures of human life that the analytic tradition takes up, is perspicuous to the critique as a "grammatical" illusion, one deeply grounded in the forms of ordinary language, the ordinary descriptive locutions and turns of phrase it permits.¹⁰ Like other such pictures, it arises from certain characteristic desires, presenting their imagined fulfillment; but it does not survive the lucid description of these desires and reflection on the nature of their demand.¹¹

More generally, the modes of analytic criticism expressed in the projects of Sellars, Quine, and Wittgenstein, and formulated in their most significant results, express grounds for criticizing what we might describe as our tendency to assume the *fixity* of meaning across the heterogeneity and diversity of contexts of linguistic use. The metaphysical picture of rules that is the

target of Wittgenstein's criticism in the *Investigations*, for instance, is a picture of the basis of such fixity, of the regular meaning of a word as consisting in the regularity of the rule that underlies its use. Something similar could be said about the critical bearing of Quine's radical translation result against Carnap's conception of languages as calculi, and Sellars' criticism of Ryle's structuralist eliminativism. In each of these cases, analytic reflection on the problematic relationship of language to anything intelligible as its "use" leads to a deep challenge to the claim that the meaningfulness of terms is explicable by means of an explication of the rules supposed to be responsible for it. In this challenge, even if it is not generally perceived as posing a devastating challenge to structuralism as such, the inherent instabilities of the structuralist picture of language come to the fore as challenges to the coherence or possibility of its existing specific formulations.

But if the real object of critique is not any of these specific formulations, but rather their more general, and deeply natural, picture of language that they determinately formulate, then the sites of criticism do not stop short of the infinitely varied contexts of a human life, wherever meaning is in question at all. For the commitments and pictures that lead us to (as we may put it) "assume" the fixity of meanings, or "presuppose" substantial identities of sense underlying our varied uses of a word, are already present, in our ordinary language, as soon as we begin to reflect on the relationship of words to their meanings, as soon as we experience their singular tokens as *instances* of a more general category at all. The critique that begins as "linguistic" demystification is therefore, with its more radical application to the "metaphysics of meaning" that must be seen to underlie everyday reflection on meaning as much as the determinate theoretical forms of analysis and explanation that grow from it, no longer presentable simply as consisting in the dissolution of errors or superstitions. It cannot be seen (though this is certainly part of its work) simply as eliminating distorting falsehoods from a human life that could then be revealed, purged of the mystifications of philosophy, in an undistorted and pure form. Rather, the analytic critique of language joins with those other expressions of a broader critique of metaphysics that have increasingly located the sites of its operation, and the point of its threat to the clarity of the human life, in nothing short of the innumerable variety of contexts in which meaning is open to question, from the first word of language to the last.

In this, the analytic tradition joins with, as I shall argue in the following chapters, the neighboring traditions of "continental" philosophy that have, especially in the twentieth century, taken up an older critique of metaphysics in the critical mode of reflection on the forms of language and our access to them. In recent historiography, the origin of the widely acknowledged "divide" between "continental" and "analytic" philosophy has been widely and variously located in time and space. Some locate it at the beginning of the existence of the analytic tradition as such (for instance, in the discussion between Frege and Husserl over logic, language, and psychology and in the

different conclusions they reached about the centrality of language to philosophical analysis;¹² or in Russell and Moore's rebellion against post-Hegelian idealism¹³). Others cite some of the particularly divisive episodes in which analytic philosophers have explicitly attacked the methods and results of "continental" philosophers. One infamous example of such an attack is Carnap's scathing criticism of a few sentences drawn from Heidegger's 1929 Freiburg inaugural lecture, "What is Metaphysics?"¹⁴ Still others locate the historical origins of the divergence in more or less contingent historical or sociological facts¹⁵ (for instance the immigration of many prominent representatives of logical empiricism to the USA after World War II).

However, though, the split of the analytic tradition from its philosophical neighbors is located, it can hardly be denied that questions of the structure and limits of linguistic meaning played a decisive role in producing it. Early in the tradition, the project of linguistic criticism combined with positivistic assumptions about experience and the forms of objective knowledge to produce the project of the "overcoming of metaphysics" that Schlick, Carnap, and other members of the Vienna Circle pursued zealously, and with prejudice, against the methods, aims, and statements of contemporary philosophers like Husserl and Heidegger. The analytic philosophers who applied this kind of critique saw themselves as possessing clear, logically based criteria of meaningfulness and empiricist criteria of significance that expressly excluded what they saw as the speculative, non-empirical claims of phenomenologists. The criticism, however, often showed no very clear understanding of the actual motivations and projects underlying these claims, and so as often as not mistook them; often the claims themselves were much more humble and "analytic" than their critique implied.¹⁶ In any case, the specifically positivist and verificationist terms of the critique were soon themselves to be overcome, within the analytic tradition itself, by mid-century projects that saw themselves as having decisively passed beyond logical positivism.

Interestingly, though, even when it became clear that these criteria of meaningfulness and significance could not be applied in the straightforward and univocal way that the logical empiricists had supposed, analytic philosophers have persisted in criticizing the claims and expressions of continental philosophers in methodologically similar ways. The newer attacks most often deploy more general criteria of clarity in argumentation and precision in expression, criticizing the claims of continental philosophers as being unclear or even unintelligible.¹⁷ But like the earlier attacks, they rest essentially on the analytic philosopher's claim to pass judgment on linguistic possibilities of sense.

Methodologically speaking, then, the claim of analytic philosophers to criticize continental projects has remained dependent on the claim, already decisive for the logical empiricists, to determine, and apply, a standard capable of circumscribing the possibilities of meaningful philosophical language. The prejudicial application of this critique against the projects of continental

philosophy has been vastly excessive; and the subsequent internal development of the analytic tradition's own modes of critique indeed provides reason to doubt its continuing trenchancy. As I shall attempt partially to demonstrate over the next three chapters, in fact, that the analytic criticisms of continental philosophy have most pervasively and unfortunately missed is the extent to which various projects of continental philosophy over the twentieth century have themselves moved to perform a sophisticated critical reflection on the role of language in the life of its speakers. Over the course of the twentieth century, the inquiries of phenomenology, hermeneutics, critical theory and deconstruction have all undertaken deep and penetrating investigations into the "nature of language," into its underlying forms and the implications of its role in human life. These inquiries, good heirs to the Kantian project, have self-consciously struggled with and against the claims of a metaphysics that they have come to recognize as pervasive in everyday as well as philosophical language, a metaphysics that is as old as philosophy and whose effects on the forms and practices of our everyday lives are both ubiquitous and determinative. One of my hopes in pursuing the significant, and deepening, connections between this critical struggle and the parallel one that, I argue, the analytic tradition has similarly undertaken, is that the usual dismissive attitude that one still finds among practitioners of each "tradition" toward the other can yield to a broader and more responsible conversation, informed by the deep questions of language that both traditions share.

6 Wittgenstein, Kant, and the critique of totality

One of the most central and familiar elements of Wittgenstein's later philosophy is his call to replace the traditional inquiries of philosophy with investigation into the "use" (*Gebrauch*) of words in their various practical connections and surroundings, linguistic and non-linguistic.¹ Again and again, Wittgenstein counsels his readers to abandon the search for "deep" or esoteric inquiries into the nature of things, in favor of reminders of the ways we actually employ language in the vast variety of contexts and situations that comprise a human life. But despite the familiarity and widespread influence of Wittgenstein's appeal to use, I argue in this chapter, this appeal has a critical significance that commentators have often missed. What has been missed in projects that construe Wittgenstein as offering a theory of meaning as grounded in social practice, in fact, is a far-ranging *critique of totality* that runs through Wittgenstein's work, early and late.

For although he constantly directs his readers to recall the "use" of a word, Wittgenstein nevertheless just as constantly resists the natural temptation to think of this use as an object, a unity, or a whole, accessible to a comprehensive, theoretical understanding of practice or enclosable within a set of determinate rules. In this way, his practice of linguistic criticism works to undermine the totalizing assumptions behind not only what can be called a "metaphysical" picture of the nature and force of rules but also the concrete technological and material practices that this kind of picture tends to support. Wittgenstein's philosophical method, in fact, challenges just those features of thought that Adorno, in *Negative Dialectics*, characterized as "identity thinking," and joins the tradition of critical theory in its criticism of the totalizing assumptions that underlie it. Seeing this connection—a connection ultimately rooted in the common Kantian heritage that Wittgenstein's project shares with the project of critical theory—can help us to understand the *political* significance of Wittgenstein's investigations of language in a new way, and suggests farther-ranging implications for the kind of philosophical reflection they embody.

I

It is a familiar point that one aim of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, particularly in the *Transcendental Dialectic*, is to exhibit the fundamental incompleteness of human thought. This incompleteness is, for Kant, a consequence of the operation of the very principles of reason itself, of the inevitability of its own critical questioning, in accordance with these principles, of its own scope and limits. What Kant, in the *Dialectic*, calls "transcendental illusion" results from our tendency to misunderstand the principles of reason, construing these actually subjective rules as if they were objective principles really governing things in the world. The misunderstanding results from reason's inherent function, to synthesize the principles of the understanding into a higher unity.² It does so by means of *inference*, striving to reduce the variety of principles of the understanding (*Grundsätze*) under the unity of a small number of inferential principles of reason (*Prinzipien*).³ But in so doing, reason also creates the problematic "pure concepts" or "transcendental ideas" (A 321/B 378) that stand in no direct relationship to any given object.

The transcendental ideas arise from reason's synthesis by means of inference, in particular, when this process of synthesis is thought of as complete.⁴ According to Kant, in seeking to unify knowledge under higher inferential principles, reason seeks the condition for any given conditioned, leading it ultimately to seek totality in the series of conditions leading to any particular phenomenon:

Accordingly, in the conclusion of a syllogism we restrict a predicate to a certain object, after having first thought it in the major premiss in its whole extension under a given condition. This complete quantity of the extension in relation to such a condition is called *universality* (*universalitas*). In the synthesis of intuitions we have corresponding to this the *allness* (*universitas*) or *totality* of the conditions. The transcendental concept of reason is, therefore, none other than the concept of the *totality* of the *conditions* for any given conditioned.⁵

The search for totality, Kant explains, takes three forms, corresponding to the three kinds of inference through which reason can arrive at knowledge by means of principles.⁶ These three forms furnish the rational ideas of soul, world, and God that are the objects of transcendental dialectic. In each case, however, the transcendental critique will show that the pretension of these ideas to furnish to knowledge objects corresponding to them is unfounded. Whatever the subjective validity of the ideas of reason in instructing us to pursue the search for ever-greater unification, the attempt to provide objects of knowledge corresponding to the total synthesis of conditions cannot succeed.

Accordingly, one upshot of the Kantian critique of the totalizing ideas of reason, significant for the critical projects that would descend from it, is that the work of reason in synthesizing knowledge is, for Kant, essentially

incomplete. The critique of transcendental illusion opens an irreducible gulf between the sphere of possible knowledge and the satisfaction of reason's own demands, disrupting every attempt or pretense to present the work of reason as complete or completeable. As John Sallis (1980) has argued, the Kantian critique of totality thus reveals the impossibility of any final repair of the "fragmentation" that is characteristic of finite knowledge. By contrast with the unifying power of the deduction of the categories in the *Transcendental Analytic*, which succeeds in gathering the manifold of intuition into unities under the categories of the understanding, the "gathering of reason" attempted in the *Transcendental Dialectic* ultimately fails:

Thus, in each of the gatherings of reason, critique exhibits a radical non-correspondence between the two moments that belong to the structure of the gathering, between the unity posited by reason and the actual gathering of the manifold into this unity. It shows that in every case the actual gathering of the manifold falls short of the unity into which reason would gather that manifold. An inversion is thus prepared: With respect to its outcome the gathering of reason is precisely the inverse of that gathering of pure understanding that is measured in the *Transcendental Analytic*. Whereas the gathering of reason culminates in the installation of radical difference between its moments, the gathering of understanding issues in identity, unity, fulfillment.⁷

Whereas the categories in the *Analytic* result in a gathering of the representations of the intuition into a unity that is stable and uncontested, the gathering of reason fails to result in a unity of knowledge, instead installing a kind of essential difference at the heart of reason's work. This difference is the gap between reason's actual attainments and its own irrepressible demands; it recurrently determines the failure of reason to complete its synthetic work. The line of critique, stably drawn in the *Analytic* between the field of possible contents of experience and that which transcends this field, accordingly becomes destabilized. The work of reason's self-critique becomes a practically endless dialogue, an ever-renewed questioning of the claims of positive knowledge and a critical interrogation of its intrinsic claims to totality. The line that critique draws between truth and illusion becomes, rather than a stable line between two fields of definable contents, the unstable and constantly shifting line of reason's rediscovered finitude in the face of its infinite aims.

Kant's installation of radical difference and essential unsatisfiability in reason's own work proves essential, moreover, to the ability of critical practice to disrupt the totalizing claims of *instrumentalized* and *reified* conceptions of reason. In his lectures on Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, Theodor Adorno suggests that this moment of Kantian critique is in fact the source of critique's power to break up the hegemony of the "identity thinking" that ceaselessly determines its object through the abstract assumption of a stable and complete unity of knowledge:

On the one hand, we think of the *Critique of Pure Reason* as a kind of identity-thinking. This means that it wishes to reduce the synthetic *a priori* judgments and ultimately all organized experience, all objectively valid experience, to an analysis of the consciousness of the subject. . . . On the other hand, however, this way of thinking desires to rid itself of mythology, of the illusion that man can make certain ideas absolute and hold them to be the whole truth simply because he happens to have them within himself. In this sense Kantian philosophy is one that enshrines the validity of the non-identical in the most emphatic way possible. It is a mode of thought that is not satisfied by reducing everything that exists to itself. Instead, it regards the idea that all knowledge is contained in mankind as a superstition and, in the spirit of the Enlightenment, it wishes to criticize it as it would criticize any superstition.

Now the greatness of the *Critique of Pure Reason* is that these two motifs clash. To give a stark description we might say that the book contains an identity philosophy—that is, a philosophy that attempts to ground being in the subject—and also a non-identity philosophy—one that attempts to restrict that claim to identity by insisting on the obstacles, the *block*, encountered by the subject in its search for knowledge. And you can see the double nature of Kant's philosophy in the dual organization of the *Critique of Pure Reason*.⁸

According to Adorno, Kant's thinking is implicitly totalizing in its attempt—with one of its voices—to reduce all knowledge to a unity of categories or *a priori* representations, to delimit the sphere of possible knowledge to the closed field of transcendental subjectivity, excluding all that lies outside this field. But at the same time, as Adorno notes, Kant's recognition of the essential incompleteness of reason's work inscribes non-identity within the project of critique, disrupting every totalizing claim to reduce knowledge to a stable unity. According to Adorno, it is this recognition of non-identity that makes Kantian critique enduringly relevant for the criticism of Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment patterns of rationality. In particular, the recognition of an essential limitation and incompleteness of identity thinking allows its pretensions of unity and totality to be recurrently interrogated and criticized. "Dialectics," Adorno says in *Negative Dialectics*, "is the consistent sense of nonidentity."⁹ Kant's early recognition of this provides both the source and the enduring model for critical theory's continued application of dialectical critique to existing norms and regimes of social behavior.

II

Standard interpretations of the critical element of Wittgenstein's philosophy often present his intention as one of drawing or articulating a *line* between

meaningful language and nonsense. Thus, for instance, in his classic discussion of the *Tractatus*, Maslow suggests reading it as “a kind of Kantian phenomenalism, with the forms of language playing a role similar to Kant’s transcendental apparatus.” This interpretation, Maslow says, involves seeing language “not only [as] an instrument of thought and communication but also [as] an all-pervading factor in organizing our cognitive experience” (1961, p. xiv); the task of Wittgenstein’s critical philosophy is, according to Maslow, thus to establish the nature of this factor and mark its necessary bounds. In a similar vein, Pears (1970) suggests understanding Wittgenstein’s thought as a whole as inspired by the “Kantian” desire to understand the forms of language in order to deflate the pretensions of philosophy to go beyond them.¹⁰ According to this interpretation, the critical purpose of the *Tractatus* is to investigate the logic of language in order to pave the way for a rejection of nonsense. Once the logical conditions for the possibility of meaning are clearly understood, it will be possible clearly to distinguish utterances that satisfy these conditions from those that do not. This distinction will provide the Wittgensteinian linguistic philosopher with a new basis on which to criticize and dismiss the substantial claims of metaphysics that Kant already attacked, claims which can now be dismissed as not only going beyond any possible experience but also any possible sense.

Within the context of this usual way of viewing Wittgenstein’s critical intentions, his appeal to practice can seem to have an essentially conservative flavor. On the usual interpretation, the purpose of Wittgenstein’s treatment of meaning as use is to remind us that a word only has significance insofar as it functions within a well defined and established ordinary practice, one of the many unities of intersubjective speaking, acting, and accomplishing that Wittgenstein (so it is often supposed) designates as “language-games.” This interpretation of Wittgenstein as a conservative thinker has in fact prompted some to reject Wittgenstein’s method outright.¹¹ Alternatively, others have accepted and celebrated what they see as the “conservative” implications of Wittgenstein’s appeal to use.¹² Still others, along similar lines, take the supposed uncriticizability of practices on Wittgenstein’s view to establish a relativism that denies the possibility of criticizing any practice or “language game” from any position external to it.¹³ On all of these interpretations, however, Wittgenstein’s appeal to use has the significance of dismissing nonsense on the basis of an identification of sense with the unity of a practice. The accordance or non-accordance of a piece of language with the standards or criteria established by an existing practice—itsself thought of as, in principle, a bounded and demarcated unity—determines the extent to which it has sense. As the stable basis for the critical determination of sense, the unity of practices is itself, on this standard interpretation, immune from criticism. The delimitation of the bounds of sense and the identification of nonsense can only confirm and consolidate existing practices, tracing their boundaries ever more securely, but never challenging their underlying stability.

Despite the near-ubiquity of this usual reading, however, Wittgenstein can be read differently. In particular, an alternative interpretation becomes possible as soon as we see another way in which Wittgenstein inherits the critical legacy of Kant.¹⁴ For Wittgenstein, I shall argue, does not invoke “use” only, or primarily, to *confirm* the logic of existing practices by identifying their boundaries with the bounds of sense. For even though Wittgenstein’s invocation of “use” calls upon us to remember the way that the sense of a word is dependent on its usual employment, on the surroundings of practice in which it ordinarily functions, Wittgenstein also constantly and recurrently aims to challenge the assumption of any stable theoretical *delimitation* of these surroundings.

Indeed, as Alice Crary (2000) has recently argued, the standard interpretation of Wittgenstein’s project as drawing a stable critical line between sense and nonsense itself results from the assumption that Wittgenstein formulates a “use-theory” of meaning according to which the “place a bit of language has in our lives—the public techniques to which it is tied—fixes or determines its meaning.”¹⁵ As Crary argues, this standard way of understanding Wittgenstein’s intention makes the assumption of a fixed line, determinable in principle, between the kinds of use licensed by these “techniques” and those outside their bounds more or less inevitable. This, in turn, generates the entire debate between “conservative” interpreters who see Wittgenstein as arguing for the inviolability of established practices and “conventionalist” or relativist interpreters who see him as establishing the contingency of any particular set of practices. Against this, Crary urges that we need not see Wittgenstein as theorizing meanings as “fixed” at all:

Wittgenstein hopes to expose as confused the idea that meanings might somehow be “fixed” (whether independently of use or otherwise). There is, he wants us to grasp, no such thing as a metaphysical vantage point which, if we managed to occupy it, would disclose to us that meaning were “fixed” in one way or another and would therefore enable us to bypass the (sometimes enormously difficult) task of trying to see whether or not a new employment of a given expression preserves important connections with other employments. His aim is to get us to relinquish the idea of such a vantage point and, at the same time, to relinquish the idea that what we imagine is to be seen from such a vantage point has some bearing on our ability to submit practices to criticism.¹⁶

As Crary suggests, we can actually gain a new sense of the critical implications of Wittgenstein’s practice of linguistic reflection by seeing the way in which it resists the idea of the fixity of meaning that underlies the most usual way of understanding them.¹⁷ This problematizes the usual understanding of the shape of Wittgenstein’s inheritance of Kant—according to which Wittgenstein would be involved in the project of drawing a fixed,

stable line between sense and nonsense—but also makes room for another way of understanding the Kantian legacy of Wittgenstein’s method. If Wittgensteinian reflection on meaning is not the drawing of a stable line of critique, but rather an ever-renewed process of reflecting on the shifting and unstable boundaries of sense, then one result of Wittgenstein’s method, like Kant’s own critique of reason, is to call into question the totalizing view that any such line can be drawn at all.

Wittgenstein’s first work, the *Tractatus*, already carries out a practice of reflecting on meaning by reflecting on use, and enacts, at least implicitly, a critique of the assumption of the totality of use. The preface specifies the aim of the book as that of drawing “a limit to thought, or rather—not to thought, but to the expression of thought” (*TLP*, p. 3). For Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus*, the critical line is not to be drawn between two regions of thought that are independently identifiable; this would involve thinking on both sides of the limit, which would be impossible. Instead, immanent reflection on the uses of terms and propositions in ordinary language is itself to provide the basis for any possibility of critically distinguishing between sense and nonsense. As we saw in Chapter 3, Wittgenstein’s use-doctrine of meaningfulness in the *Tractatus* supports, as well, the official Tractarian account of the origination of philosophical error. According to the account, the illusions that lead us to philosophical inquiries typically arise from mistaking the uses of words in ordinary language. Because ordinary language allows one and the same sign to be used in various possible ways, we very often misconstrue our signs or fail to give them any determinate use at all. Accordingly, Wittgenstein says that the correct method of philosophy would simply be to criticize this kind of mistake:

The correct method in philosophy would really be the following: to say nothing except what can be said, i.e. propositions of natural science—i.e. something that has nothing to do with philosophy—and then, whenever someone else wanted to say something metaphysical, to demonstrate to him that he had failed to give a meaning to certain signs in his propositions.

(6.53)

By reminding ourselves of the uses that we ourselves have given—or failed to give—our signs, we correct the typical errors that lead to philosophical speculation.

In the practice of philosophical criticism that the *Tractatus* recommends, therefore, reflection about the correct or legitimate uses of signs suffices to expose the errors of ordinary language and positive metaphysics alike. But nowhere in the *Tractatus* does Wittgenstein suggest that it must ultimately be coherent to state the rules of “logical syntax” that distinguish sense from nonsense. In fact, the suggestion of the *Tractatus* as a whole is that any such statement must undermine itself:

My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them—as steps—to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.)

He must transcend these propositions, and then he will see the world aright.

(6.54)

The remarks that “frame” the *Tractatus* thus suggest a pragmatic and performative dimension of its teaching that does not appear on the level of straightforward theory. Rather, as recent commentators like Diamond (1991) have suggested, they invite us to undertake a certain kind of elucidatory self-criticism. According to Diamond, the point of the book is not to show or reveal some metaphysical structure of the language and the world, substantial in itself, that can be said or described; the point is, rather, to dramatize the non-existence of any such structure by showing that the attempt to describe it immediately results in nonsense.¹⁸ The text invites us to see this by leading us to enter imaginatively into the supposed theory of the world and language that it outlines, and then showing us how, by the very lights of this theory itself, every proposition that attempts to express it must be nonsense. In this “play of the imagination”—constituted by our initial identification with, and then forceful separation from, the position of the philosopher who takes the sentences of the *Tractatus* to outline a substantial theory—we come to see the illusoriness of the perspective from which the propositions that theoretical philosophy formulates can seem to have sense. We gain the kind of “solution” that is “seen in the vanishing of the problem”—vanishing not in the sense of having been resolved or answered, but in the sense that it has been revealed as not being a problem at all.

In the particular case of the *Tractatus* theory of meaning, therefore, attending to the “frame remarks” allows us to see how the very same critical movement that draws the line between sense and nonsense also serves to destabilize it. Thus, the practice of distinguishing sense from nonsense, rather than depending on a stable theoretical boundary, becomes a constantly renewed work of reasoning in concrete cases, without the assurance of any unitary criterion of meaningfulness exterior to this work itself. This compels us to recognize not only the inherent instability of the critique of nonsense, but also the *Tractatus*’ ongoing engagement with the metaphysics that it criticizes.¹⁹ If Tractarian critique is self-critique, then it cannot result in any stable, unified, or totalizing demarcation of the bounds of sense. The reflection on the uses of words that it calls upon us to undertake does not actually aim at, or conclude in, the demarcation of a stable region of “sense” to be distinguished from another region of “nonsense.” Instead, the idea of such a stable demarcation is itself one of the pieces of metaphysics that the *Tractatus* centrally aims to confront. The self-critical practice of

linguistic reflection problematizes, in its very critical movement, every attempt to authorize such a line.

For the later Wittgenstein, then, seeing the great variety and heterogeneity of the contexts in which we can significantly employ a word means seeing the complexity of anything that we can understand as its “use.” And although there is a sense in which the use of the word is present to my mind when I understand it (in the sense that, if I understand it, I know how to use it), knowing the use in this sense does not mean having the totality of the word’s uses present to mind, not even in a shadowy or schematic way.²⁰ To understand the word is to know how to use it, and the understanding of a word is manifest in the kinds of use one makes of it, in a diversity of contexts, over time. But even while seeing this, there is a deep temptation to think that to understand the use of the word is to grasp the totality of its use all at once, in the moment of understanding; and accordingly that this totality of use must exist as a whole, present to the mind as a unity underlying all the diverse instances of its expression. The temptation is, evidently, of a piece with those underlying psychologistic theories of content that explain it in terms of private and subjective acts, objects or events. Like these theories, it seeks to explain our actual performance in terms of the presence to mind of a superlative item, capable of underlying the infinite diversity of this performance in a way no symbol or picture could actually do. Wittgenstein’s critique of it, like the analytic tradition’s long-standing critique of psychologism, develops the specific significance of reflection on the structure of language to the point of its inherent instabilities. It applies this reflection critically to show the untenability of the very assumption of a totality of use, underlying the use of ordinary words, that descriptions of this structure most often presuppose.

The opening sections of the *Investigations* develop Wittgenstein’s invocation of use by reminding the reader of the diversity of uses of words, of the various ways in which they function and bring about results.²¹ The “Augustinian” picture of language with which the *Investigations* begins is, itself, Wittgenstein argues, a characteristic result of failing to see this diversity of function.²² Augustine’s mistake is like the failure of someone who, seeing the visual uniformity of a printed script, assumes that the uses and purposes of the words are as uniform and similar as the script itself appears to be.²³ Characteristic philosophical errors—for instance the error of assuming that every sentence is a proposition, or that every propositional sentence is the “assertion” of a judgment—themselves result from the same tendency to miss the great multiplicity of different purposes of words in the language.²⁴

Wittgenstein’s criticism, in the *Investigations*, of the explicit theoretical position of the *Tractatus* itself consists partly in reminding the reader of the inherent complexity and heterogeneity of the uses of any word.²⁵ Missing this complexity, Wittgenstein argues, we are inclined to think of the meaning of a word as something uniform that it carries with it on each occasion

of its use. In pursuing philosophical questions about meaning, we can become seduced by the appearance that the term or proposition carries its significance with it like an aura, that this significance accompanies it automatically into every kind of application.²⁶ Insofar as the *Tractatus* sought to answer the general question of the nature of meaning by introducing a general account of the logical form of propositions and language, it too committed this characteristic error of reducing the diversity and heterogeneity of uses of a word to a unity co-present with it on each occasion. The search for an explanation of meaning led to the assumption that there must be “strict and clear rules of the logical structure of propositions,” somehow hidden in “the medium of the understanding.”²⁷ The assumption of an underlying logical structure of language thereby became an “unshakable” ideal, an assumption of “crystalline purity” that dictates the form that the investigation must subsequently take.²⁸

Resisting this ideal, “we see that what we call ‘sentence’ and ‘language’ has not the formal unity that I imagined, but is the family of structures more or less related to one another” (*PI* 108). Meaningful language itself is not a region of praxis that can be delimited by the introduction of any uniform theoretical standard or criterion. Instead, it is a complex family of structures and concepts, interconnected in the most various and diverse ways with the whole variety of material and social practices that comprise a human life. Wittgenstein’s heuristic use of the concepts of “family resemblance” and “language games” themselves aim to remind us of this irreducible diversity. In each case, looking to the “use” of a word—reminding ourselves of how it is actually used—means also reminding ourselves that our understanding of this “use” is no stable unity, no delimitable totality, but rather an essentially open application of the word to ever-new contexts of significance.

III

We have seen that, in the opening sections of the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein’s investigation of use leads him repeatedly to criticize the characteristic assumption of totality that presents the use of a word as a theoretically definable whole. Another version of this assumption, in fact, is the main critical target of the skein of interrelated passages standardly described as the “rule-following considerations.” For Wittgenstein, the “metaphysical concept of a rule” that he critiques in these passages is itself a totalizing concept; its effect is to present a mythology of the application of words as grounded in the presence to mind of the totality of this application, all at once. Wittgenstein’s internal critique of the concept of a rule aims to disrupt this totalizing assumption, exposing the untenability of the mythological picture of use it formulates.

According to Wittgenstein in the *Investigations*, one of the key sources of the *Tractatus*’ positive picture of meaning was the assumption that “if

anyone utters a sentence and *means* or *understands* it he is operating a calculus according to definite rules” (*PI* 81). The *Tractatus*’ positive appeal to rules of “logical syntax” underlying the use of language distorted the actual form of linguistic practice, construing the variety and multiplicity of our uses of words as controlled by a uniform underlying system. But this misunderstanding was, for Wittgenstein, just one case of a more general and ubiquitous one that arises whenever we think of our linguistic practices as constrained by intelligible rules that, by themselves, determine the correct and incorrect application of words across an infinite diversity of cases. Wittgenstein’s account of the source of this error echoes his account in the *Blue Book*. Seeing that reflection on meaning is reflection on use, we are tempted to think that the whole use of the word must be, in some sense, present in the mind on each occasion of its use.²⁹ We then think of the rule itself as a superlative item, somehow capable of determining an infinite number of cases, despite being itself a finite item.

The thought that “in a *queer* way, the use itself is in some sense present” to the mind on each instance of successful understanding is thus the most characteristic source of the metaphysical picture of a rule that Wittgenstein criticizes.³⁰ When we think of the “entire use” as underlying and determining any specific instance of it, we are tempted to think of it as captured by something—the symbolic expression of a rule, or a picture or image—that itself determines each of an infinite number of instances of application, that determines what is, in each of an infinite number of cases, the right way to apply the word in question. Against this metaphysical picture of the rule, Wittgenstein reminds us that any finite, symbolic expression of a rule is capable of various interpretations. No such expression suffices to determine or delimit, by itself, the infinite number of cases in which a word is used correctly. When thought of in this superlative way, the symbolic expression is really “a mythological description of the use of a rule” (*PI* 221).

Wittgenstein’s critique of rule-following therefore seeks to disrupt a characteristic picture of the totality of the use of a word; but it also targets a typical way of thinking about identity of meaning that tends to hold this picture in place. This becomes evident at *PI* 214–16, where Wittgenstein responds to an interlocutory suggestion that an “intuition” must be needed, in each particular case of the development of a series, to determine the correct way to go on. Characteristically, Wittgenstein’s response is a *reductio* of the interlocutor’s invocation of “intuition” in this case:

214. If you have to have an intuition in order to develop the series 1 2 3 4
 ... you must also have one in order to develop the series 2 2 2 2 ...

215. But isn’t at least *the same* the same?

We seem to have an infallible paradigm of identity in the identity of a thing with itself. I feel like saying: “Here at any rate there can’t be a variety of interpretations. If you are seeing a thing you are seeing identity too.”

Then are two things the same when they are what *one* thing is? And how am I to apply what the one thing shews me to the case of two things? 216. "A thing is identical with itself."—There is no finer example of a useless proposition, which yet is connected with a certain play of the imagination. It is as if in imagination we put a thing into its own shape and saw that it fitted.

This appeal to an "intuition" is one characteristic recourse of the metaphysical picture of the rule. The interlocutor attempts to ground this picture, ultimately, in what he thinks of as the *self-identity* of a rule, its sameness to itself across the infinite set of its instances. If the metaphysical picture of the rule were correct, indeed, a rule would be a finite item that determines an infinite number of cases by repeating itself identically in each of its instances of application. The self-sameness of the rule, its abstract identity with itself, would provide the ultimate basis for its uniform applicability across an infinite number of possible cases. The application of rules would be thinkable only as the infinite repetition of a selfsame item, even across a great variety of cases and contexts. In challenging the characteristic assumption of totality that leads to the metaphysical picture of the rule, Wittgenstein's critique also challenges this assumption of self-identity. Along with it, he challenges the characteristic impression of necessity that most often accompanies the adumbration of logical, semantic, or grammatical rules of use, the impression that these rules themselves determine what can be said, and on what occasions. The point of the critique is not that there are no necessities governing our use of language, but that the attempt to schematize these necessities in rules conceived as by themselves determining, all by themselves, possibilities of significant usage mistakes the reality of language's own inherent possibilities of self-critique. Presenting these possibilities as if they were determined already anyway by a fixed set of articulable standards, it forecloses the essential and constitutive openness of language to the heterogeneity of its applications, and the standing openness of these applications to ever-changing terms of immanent linguistic critique.

IV

I have argued that a decisive element of Wittgenstein's critical invocation of use is his critique of the assumption of totality that would portray the use of a word as a stable unity of practice. Insofar as Wittgenstein's method directs us to seek the meaning of a word by reflecting on praxis, its aim is not to introduce any kind of unifying theory of linguistic practices, but rather to disrupt the assumption that any such unification is possible at all. The assumption of totality that Wittgenstein criticizes is a characteristic feature of philosophical attempts to theorize meaning positively, including what may seem to be Wittgenstein's own attempt in the positive movement of the *Tractatus*. But the significance of Wittgenstein's critique of totality is

by no means limited to its bearing against specialized philosophical theories. Indeed, it is well known that Wittgenstein thought of his philosophical work as relevant to the resolution of cultural, political, and social questions, even though it has not always been obvious how this relevance should be understood.

Many of Wittgenstein's remarks in *Culture and Value* exhibit his well known pessimism about the idea of technological progress and his lack of faith in the social and material practices of the modern world.³¹ As is also well known, Wittgenstein was at least somewhat sympathetic with Marxism, and his thinking in the *Investigations* may have been significantly influenced by that of the Marxist economist Sraffa. But beyond these personal and biographical connections, Wittgenstein's central philosophical texts also in fact exhibit a deep concern with the metaphysics that underlies contemporary institutions and social and material practices.³² In particular, Wittgenstein was undoubtedly well aware of the dominance, in the twentieth century, of a regime of thought that tends to assimilate individual, concrete acts of reasoning and communication to a unified field of abstract, formal logic. His own *Tractatus* was misread—most significantly by the Vienna Circle logical positivists—as a contribution to the theory of this field. And over the period of his interactions with the Circle, Wittgenstein became acutely critical of the motivations of those who saw in logic the key to a new “construction” of the world.³³ Wittgenstein was also, doubtless, aware of the way in which this regime of thought can support dominant cultural practices of technology, systematization and calculation. Characteristically, these practices treat individual actions as significant only insofar as they can be evaluated and repeated from the standpoint of abstract rationality, which itself is conceived as a system of universal rules.

Commentators have long speculated about the political implications of Wittgenstein's work, but it is only recently that a significant number of interpreters have begun to see his practice of linguistic reflection as supporting a practice of critique that is radical and potentially liberatory with respect to prevailing social practices and norms. McManus (2003), for instance, has argued that Wittgenstein's consideration of prevailing practices of measurement and calculation, particularly in the context of the philosophy of mathematics, can actually support a far-ranging critique of our tendency to treat these numerical practices as referring to substantial realities in themselves. Without such a critique, McManus suggests, we tend to “reify” the relevant practices, giving them an unquestioned and otherwise undeserved value. Similarly, Janik (2003) suggests that one target of Wittgenstein's critique of rule-following might be the kinds of *regularity* that a certain conception of rule-following in fact tends to produce in our political and social practices of legislation and authority, and accordingly that Wittgenstein can be read as a critic of some of these practices.

For these commentators, Wittgenstein's critical reflection on rules offers a position from which it becomes possible both to question the assumptions

of regularity and fixity that underlie normal descriptions of the regularity of typical practices, for instance of calculation and legislation, and to criticize these practices themselves on that basis. When, in particular, large sectors of social practice and prevailing institutions become governed by deeply held assumptions of regularity and uniformity, such a critical reflection on the sources of these assumptions becomes particularly important. If the current analysis is correct, in fact, these particular suggestions for the application of Wittgensteinian critique are simply isolated examples of a much more general and far-ranging critical method, bearing not only against the assumptions implicit or explicit in particular practices of calculation, automation, and legislation, but also against the whole complex of deeply held metaphysical assumptions that make the normative logic of these practices possible.

The Frankfurt School's concept of "reification" offers more general terms for thinking about prevailing social practices and their foundation in totalizing patterns of thought, including the "identity thinking" that Adorno criticizes throughout his comprehensive *Negative Dialectics*.³⁴ The critique of these linked concepts targets not only particular instances of injurious or oppressive practice, but the whole cultural style of an entire historical period. For the early Frankfurt School, the critical examination of socially dominant characterizations of reason and rationality provides a particularly important critical index of such a style, one that Wittgenstein himself occasionally characterizes as the "spirit" of modern, Western civilization. Wittgenstein's own critique of the metaphysical concept of the rule strongly resembles the Frankfurt School's sustained criticism of the regime of thought and practice that construes rationality as formal, symbolic ratiocination.³⁵ Against this regime, Wittgenstein, like Adorno and Horkheimer, seeks to re-inscribe in our thinking a sense of the openness of everyday practices to novelty and difference, and of the necessary failure of any attempt to enclose this difference within a totality of theory or explanation.³⁶ Beyond simply echoing the Frankfurt School's critique of reification, however, Wittgenstein's self-reflexive philosophical method also offers to give us the terms in which we can formulate this critique as a linguistic one: that is, as a critique of assumptions and habits of thought that lie deeply concealed in language itself, and that only linguistic self-reflection offers to remove.³⁷

In suggesting that we can read Wittgenstein as critical of the ideological support of prevailing social practices, I do not mean to suggest that he himself thought of this kind of social critique as a prevailing, or even an explicit, goal of his philosophical practice. It is true that Wittgenstein says little explicitly about the social and political implications of his own work. But as we have seen, this has not prevented commentators from interpreting the social and political implications of his view of language. Indeed, it seems obviously appropriate to interrogate the critical consequences of Wittgenstein's practice, given the evident Kantian background of his project of reflection. What I have offered in this chapter is an alternative interpretation of these consequences, one that shows that Wittgenstein need not be construed as a

social conservative or as contributing to the dominance of entrenched conceptions of reasoning and rationality. Instead, I have argued, we can read him as offering new terms for the identification, diagnosis and interrogation of the deep ideological foundations of these dominant and entrenched conceptions.

If this is correct, then another benefit of the kind of reading I suggest here is that it can begin to open, in a new way, reflection on the question of the relationship of analytic philosophy to the larger historical contours of Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thought. In particular, it begins to show how the characteristic analytic turn toward language can yield a kind of critical thought that continues the Enlightenment project of demystification, of identifying and criticizing the illusions of metaphysics, while nevertheless resisting the reified and standardized forms of rationality that have so often resulted from this project in the past.

7 Thinking and being

Heidegger and Wittgenstein on machination and lived-experience

Over the last several chapters, we have seen how the analytic tradition's inquiry into language has led it repeatedly to experience the failures and paradoxes of its attempt to envision language as a total structure of signs. This withdrawal of language at the point of its own positive description occurs repeatedly in the history of the tradition, and marks in a fundamental way the most prominent results of its consideration of the basis and nature of linguistic meaning. The analytic tradition's inquiry into language begins with the attempt to demonstrate the philosophical relevance of what at first seems self-evident, our ordinary access to the language that we speak. It ends, as we have seen over the last several chapters, by demonstrating the inherent and pervasive ambiguities of this access, not only in the theories of philosophers but in its everyday forms as well. In the demonstration, what had been self-evident becomes less so; the aporias of the explicit, theoretical attempt to grasp the structure of language reveal the underlying and pervasive ambiguities of our ordinary relationship to it. The inherent problems of the structuralist picture of language thereby become opportunities for the renewed posing of a set of critical questions about the linguistic basis of the practices and circumstances of an ordinary life.

These critical consequences of the analytic tradition's inquiry into language come to the fore especially when this inquiry is set in a broader philosophical and historical context. To this end, in this chapter, I examine another prominent twentieth-century reflection on language, one that, although seldom well understood by analytic philosophers, experiences much the same withdrawal of language and explicitly draws from it some far-ranging critical consequences about contemporary social and technological practices. The critical consequences of Heidegger's examination of language, I argue, bear deep parallels to some of the most decisive results of the analytic tradition, most centrally to the twofold consideration of "rule following" and the idea of a "private language" that marks the main critical movement of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. The two skeins of criticism are indeed linked, I shall argue, in the problematic of *self-identity* that defines the modern philosophical conception of the thinking and experiencing subject. Once made explicit, this problematic suggests new ways of thinking about *difference* and *heterogeneity* within a broader consideration of the priority of language for the human "form of life."

Characteristically, Heidegger's own engagement of language over the entirety of his career is determined by his pervasive concern with the question of the *meaning of being*. From his first writings, Heidegger sought to open a fundamental questioning regarding the possibility of expressing the basic character of "being itself." He came to see this possibility of expression, or the lack thereof, as conditioned by determinate, historically specific interpretations of the factual as well as "ontological" relationships among different kinds of beings or entities, including significantly the kind of beings we ourselves are. These interpretations themselves, according to Heidegger, find expression in the forms of language open to speakers at various historical times, and are at least partially discernible through reflection on these forms. Since the beginning of philosophical ontology with the Greeks, the history of the linguistic forms of the expression of being and the modes of thought they make possible has been, according to Heidegger, one of ever-greater forgetfulness and obscurity. The progressive withdrawal of being from any possibility of positive expression has been marked by an ever-greater development of determinate interpretations and assumptions that tend to obscure its real character and make it deeply inaccessible to us. Over the course of the 1930s, Heidegger accordingly began to speak of the entire period of this history of successive forgottenness as the period or epoch of *metaphysics*.

During this time, Heidegger accordingly began to take up with greater and greater explicitness the question of the relationship of ordinary language, and the metaphysical assumptions that underlie it, to the *life* of the kind of beings that we ourselves are, what he had characterized in *Being and Time* as "Dasein."¹ This language, he argued, has for a long time determined the life of the human being as the "subjectivity" of a subject of experience. In the complicated and enigmatic *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, written between 1936 and 1938, Heidegger connects this metaphysical conception of subjectivity as "lived-experience" to the complex of technological practices and calculational ways of thinking that he calls "Machenschaft" or machination. These are practices and ways of thinking that he sees as increasingly characteristic of, and dominant over, modern life and its forms and institutions of power; they include, but are not limited to, what he would later characterize as "technology" and "calculational ways of thinking." With the development of the "history of being" that he undertakes at this time, Heidegger aims both to unmask the complicity of a metaphysical conception of subjectivity with these forms of practice and thought, and also to demonstrate the root of this complicity in the historical forms of language that, as he holds, continue to prevent the truth of being itself from coming to expression.

I

As he became more and more concerned with the nature of language, Heidegger came to see the very possibility of the expression of being as limited by the forms of ordinary language, determined as they are by deep-seated

metaphysical assumptions and interpretations that tend to rule out this expression. Beginning in the 1930s, accordingly, his history of being aimed to prepare for the futural occurrence of an “event” (*Ereignis*) of being that is, within the metaphysical language that is the only language that exists, literally inexpressible. The term aims to express the possibility of an “en-owning” or self-expression of “being itself,” an expression that, according to Heidegger, has normally and ever more pervasively been blocked by the forms of metaphysical thinking and language. The essential hint of this event to come, according to Heidegger at this time, is provided, not by any possible expression or word of language, but by the paradoxical experience of a *withdrawal* or *refusal* of language that at the same time reveals, in negative mode, something of its positive character. The connection he thereby draws between being and the obscure possibility of its linguistic expression, leads him, at the same time, to interrogate the far-ranging connections, deeply rooted in the history of philosophy, that exist between the structures of ordinary language and the metaphysical determination of the kind of being that has, since ancient times, been specified as the *animale rationale* or the *zoon logon echon*, the “animal having language.”

In the 1930s, the experience of language thus came to determine, for Heidegger, the possibility of a futural event of being, and with it the possibility of expression that belongs to it. It was not always so. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger’s attempt to formulate the long-forgotten question of the meaning or “sense” of being through a preparatory analysis of the constitutive structures of human Dasein or “being-there” repeatedly alluded to the question of language. Nevertheless *Being and Time* did not (as later texts would) make the being of language itself central to the possibility of an understanding of being. Heidegger’s analysis of the structures of Da-sein’s “being-in”, or its possibilities of existing in the world, presented “discourse” (*Rede*) as a derivative mode of articulation, subjacent to other, more basic structures of “disclosedness” and lacking any essential priority in articulating human possibilities of sense.² Thus, *Being and Time*’s analysis of language displayed Heidegger’s interest in the question of the possibility of treating language as an object of theoretical judgment or hermeneutic reflection, without coming, yet, to anything quite like a decision on the extent or implications of this possibility:

In the end, philosophical research must for once decide to ask what mode of being belongs to language in general. Is it an innerworldly useful thing at hand or does it have the mode of being of Da-sein or neither of the two? What kind of being does language have, if it can be “dead”? What does it mean ontologically that a language grows or declines? We possess a linguistics, and the being of beings that it has as its theme is obscure; even the horizon for any investigative question about it is veiled. Is it a matter of chance that initially and for the most part significations are “worldly,” prefigured beforehand by the significance

of the world, that they are indeed often predominantly “spatial”? Or is this “fact” existentially and ontologically necessary and why? Philosophical research will have to give up the “language-philosophy” if it is to ask about the “things themselves” and attain the status of a problematic that has been clarified completely.³

The determination of language (what ancient ontology grasped as *logos*) as an *objectively present being* is itself, according to Heidegger, responsible for the basic indifference and confusion of the concept of being that it hands down to us.⁴ Within this determination, language may appear as an instrument of use, a system, or a totality of spoken or written signs; in any case, the decision that has made these prevailing interpretations of language dominant is hidden from us. Even within the course of Heidegger’s own preparatory fundamental analysis of the structures of Da-sein, the being of language remains mysterious for phenomenological investigation. Even its fundamental mode of being, what kind of “thing” it is and how it relates to Da-sein as its “speaker,” remains, as Heidegger says, veiled in obscurity. But as Heidegger undertook a more explicit examination of the historical determination of being itself by the various concepts and practices of metaphysics, he came to see the obscurity of the “mode of being” of language as in fact decisive for the withdrawal and forgottenness of “being itself” within this history. For during this period, he came to see these possibilities for the revealing or concealing of being as deeply controlled by linguistic possibilities of expression, especially insofar as the forms of language themselves have come to embody the deep proclivities of metaphysics.

The most important of these proclivities, according to Heidegger, is the tendency of language to interpret being itself as one or another form of *present being* or entity. The tendency begins with Plato’s interpretation of being in terms of the endurance of the unchanging *eidos* and continues, through medieval theology, into the modern determination of beings as *objects* representable in the self-consciousness of a *subject* of experience. This tendency, with its various modes of determination of being itself as presence, prevents the true character of being from coming to light or even from being intelligibly questioned.⁵ An abiding sense of the dangerous and destructive consequences of this withdrawal of being from expression, and the hope of the futural event that would reverse it, dominates the esoteric rhetoric and elliptical investigations of Heidegger’s “being-historical treatise” of the mid-1930s, the *Beiträge zur Philosophie: vom Ereignis*. From its first pages, in fact, *Beiträge* takes up the question of being as a question of the possibility of language, as a question of the possibility of an adequate “saying” of being itself, or of its “essential swaying” (*Wesen*) in the singular event of *Ereignis*. *Ereignis* itself, the event of “en-owning” to whose articulation the entirety of the book contributes, is difficult to define, and cannot be understood at all, according to Heidegger, through the “used-up” words of metaphysics. Thus, the entirety of the *Beiträge* will constitute an attempt

toward a “thinking-saying” of *Ereignis*, a thinking and saying that also, unlike the language of metaphysics, “belongs . . . to be-ing’s word.” In a time when the fundamental possibility of a thoughtful speaking of being has all but completely retreated, “all essential titles have become impossible” and “the genuine relation to the word has been destroyed.”⁶ The *Beiträge*’s speaking and thinking of *Ereignis* will therefore, necessarily, attempt to find a way back to this “genuine relation” through the impoverishment and failure of the language of metaphysics, a struggle with and through the language of the tradition to find the terms and voices that can again speak, or witness, its most significant experience.

Heidegger’s growing appreciation, in *Beiträge*, of the failure of metaphysical language to articulate the truth of being necessitates certain terminological innovations, giving *Beiträge* a tone that is less straightforward and more evocative and performative than the analytic prose of *Being and Time*. One of these innovations is Heidegger’s practice in *Beiträge* of re-writing “being” itself as *Seyn* rather than *Sein*, at least when he is discussing it as it might appear outside the closure of the metaphysical tradition.⁷ This is necessary, Heidegger explains, in order to gesture toward a break with the metaphysical tradition’s consistent interpretation of being as “beingness,” the quality of enduring presence and representability that the language of metaphysics constantly inscribes in its interpretation of individual beings. This stranger and more archaic way of writing “being” also aims to gesture toward the strangeness of a future experience or event of being outside the closure of this tradition, the event of *Ereignis* itself. The speaking of be-ing in *Ereignis*, Heidegger tells us, will no longer be a speaking “about” being in which words and phrases describe or represent its aspects or characteristics, but rather a direct speaking “of” be-ing itself.⁸

But the exhaustion of ordinary language makes this future speaking and thinking problematic, indeed almost impossible, in that the very linguistic terms that would be needed for it are lacking, along with the thought that those terms could call forth:

The truth of be-ing cannot be said with the ordinary language that today is ever more widely misused and destroyed by incessant talking. Can this truth ever be said directly, if all language is still the language of beings? Or can a new language for be-ing be invented? No. And even if this could be accomplished—and even without artificial word-formation—such a language would not be a saying language. All saying has to let the ability to hear arise with it.⁹

Here, Heidegger makes it clear that no new language, no innovation of new terms or introduction of new turns of phrase, can make possible the simple speaking of the truth of be-ing. The linguistic failure that renders be-ing unsayable is not simply the failure of this or that particular natural language to include the terms or metaphors that would be needed. Rather, the

failure of language to speak the truth of be-ing conditions all language in the historical epoch of the consummation of metaphysics, since this consummation itself means that the truth of be-ing withdraws from us more and more.

Following these introductory remarks, the “Preview” that begins the *Beiträge* moves to articulate the way in which the necessary failure of language makes way for the possibility of a future speaking and thinking of *Ereignis*. Insofar as this failure is not simply an empirical or contingent failure of a particular speaker, it reveals something of the character of language itself:

The word fails, not as an occasional event—in which an accomplishable speech or expression does not take place, where only the assertion and the repetition of something already said and sayable does not get accomplished—but originarily. The word does not even come to word, even though it is precisely when the word escapes one that the word begins to take its first leap. The word’s escaping one is enowning as the hint and onset of be-ing.

The word’s escaping is the inceptual condition for the self-unfolding possibility of an originary-poetic-naming of be-ing.

When will the time of language and deep stillness come, the time of the simple nearness of the essential sway and the bright remoteness of beings—when the word would once again work?¹⁰

Here, the possibility of the time of “language and deep stillness,” the time to come when “the word would once again work,” must remain radically in question, since it cannot be asserted within any language that is available today. But precisely in witnessing the necessary failure of language to speak being, Heidegger says, it becomes possible to obtain a “hint” and even an “onset” of be-ing itself.¹¹

Significantly, Heidegger’s description here of the failure of language that provides the first possibility of this first “hint,” goes far beyond anything that is suggested by *Being and Time*’s description of “keeping-silent” as a possible mode or modification of the existential structure of discourse and articulation.¹² Here, the decisive silence is not at all the contingent silence of an individual speaker who chooses to keep silent, of my choosing to hold back what I could or would otherwise say, but choose not to. The failure of language is not any longer traceable to the individual decision of a human subject at all; it is, rather, a matter of the failure of the word itself, of a situation in which “the word does not even come to word.” In his later works on language as well, Heidegger would often return to the description of what is shown in this experience of “words failing one”, finding in it, as in his earlier discussions of *Angst* and the nothingness, the possibility of a first revelation of beings as a whole in their underlying character.¹³ The failure of language to speak the truth of being under the conditions of the completion of metaphysics is not simply a matter of the absence of words or

terms. Instead, it witnesses the incapacity of any and every language, of language itself, to bring to light its own most fundamental determinants.

As is clear from Heidegger's discussions of the "ontological difference" between beings (for example, individual items, events, objects, processes, or ideas—whatever can be named) and being itself, one of the characteristic forms of this failure is the metaphysical diremption that makes every attempt to speak being, to articulate the fundamental character of being itself, collapse into the description of *a* being, an object or principle whose objective presence is subsequently presupposed. For:

Every saying of be-ing is kept in words and namings which are understandable in the direction of everyday references to beings and are thought exclusively in this direction, but which are misconstruable as the utterance of be-ing. Therefore it is not as if what is needed first is the failure of the question (within the domain of the thinking-interpretation of be-ing), but the word itself already discloses something (familiar) and thus hides that which has to be brought into the open through thinking-saying.

This difficulty cannot be eliminated at all; even the attempt to do so already means misunderstanding all saying of be-ing. This difficulty must be taken over and grasped in its essential belongingness (to the thinking of be-ing).¹⁴

This collapse of the word of be-ing into "references to beings" is not a simple error or an avoidable mistake, since it is deeply rooted in the tendency of metaphysics to determine being as beingness, or as the most general characteristic of objective and enduring presence. Correlatively, along the lines of a necessity that amounts to the sway of metaphysics over language itself, being is taken for a being, stabilized in the form of objective, enduring presence as soon as it is named at all.

II

As is well known, also beginning in the 1930s, Heidegger would consistently identify the character of modern times as determined by *technological* and *calculational* ways of thinking and behaving. These ways, he thought, manifest the most developed and injurious forms of an abiding forgetfulness or loss that traces almost to the beginning of the Western tradition. The discovery and unveiling of the hidden bases of the technological character of modern thinking and acting thus became an essential part of Heidegger's narrative interpretation of the history of Western thought from its first beginning with the Greeks to its anticipated, if wholly unforeseeable, future. But in *Beiträge* itself, the Heideggerian critique of technology develops alongside what may be a surprising result even to those familiar with this story: that the modern dominance of technology and a technological way of

thinking and relating to things—what Heidegger calls, in *Beiträge*, “machination” (*Machenschaft*)—is possible only through the conjoint emergence and growth of something that seems at first completely opposed to technology, namely individual, subjective “lived-experience” or *Erlebnis*.

Heidegger’s description of this conjoint emergence and dominance in modern times traces it to the increasing withdrawal of being from any possibility of expression within forms of language and life determined by metaphysics. This withdrawal manifests itself as the prevailing determination of being (*das Sein*) from the sole perspective of individual beings (*die Seienden*),¹⁵ and culminates in the total dominance of technological and calculational ways of thinking and handling objects. Heidegger refers to the total pattern of these ways of thinking and operating, and the interpretation of beings that facilitates them, as *machination*.¹⁶ From the perspective of machination, all objects become raw material for quantitative measurement, calculation, and manipulation according to a natural-scientific understanding of matter. With its dominance, the making and manipulating of particular objects comes completely to the fore and obscures even the possibility of any question about the essence and nature of being itself.

At the utmost limit of the process, the distress caused by the withdrawal of being and of the question of its possibility, Heidegger says, is so complete that it manifests itself as a total lack of distress, as the impossibility of even raising the question of what has withdrawn and what has been abandoned.¹⁷ But Heidegger nevertheless thinks that it is possible, even in the most advanced forms of abandonment that culminate in the total domination of machination, to detect a faint echo or resonance of the original “happening” or “swaying” (*Wesung*) of being at the time of the beginning of Western history. Perceiving this echo even in the completion of the dominant processes of technological thinking and machination, Heidegger suggests, will simultaneously enable us to gain a first premonition, hint, or intimation of the event of being, as *Ereignis*, in the “other” beginning, the one for which the thinking of the *Beiträge* aims to prepare.¹⁸

Machination thus echoes being in an age that has completely forgotten it. Coming to the fore alongside the withdrawal of being, machination fosters what is not proper to being (*das Unwesen des Seins*), what furthers this withdrawal and indeed brings it to completion. But because it does nevertheless echo the essential sway of being, machination can also prepare the way for the event of *Ereignis*, in which be-ing (*Sein*) comes into its own.¹⁹

But if we are to hear in machination the distant echo of being and see in its structure the possibility for beginning our preparation for another beginning, more is needed than simply an appreciation of its ambiguous nature. We must also understand, according to Heidegger, the long-suppressed connection between machination and what seems at first most distant from it, lived-experience or *Erlebnis*. The increasing spread and completion of the dominance of machination leads incessantly, Heidegger says, to the dominance of lived-experience as an “insipid sentimentality” in which

every undertaking and event exists as experience and to be experienced.²⁰ But behind this banality lies a matter of the utmost importance for the historical project he undertakes. For it is the thought of the hidden connection between machination and lived-experience that will complete the “basic thrust” of Western history and begin the preparation for the “other beginning”:

If machination and lived-experience are named together, then this points to an essential belongingness of both to each other . . . When thinking-mindfulness (as questioning the truth of be-ing and only as this) attains the knowing awareness of this mutual belongingness, then the basic thrust of the history of the first beginning (history of Western metaphysics) is grasped along with that, in terms of the knowing awareness of the other beginning.²¹

If we can understand what machination and lived-experience have to do with one another, Heidegger suggests, we can understand in the deepest sense how Western metaphysics, arising from the first beginning, has interpreted being and understood the nature of beings, and from this understanding begin to glimpse the futural event of be-ing in the “other beginning.”

III

In the context of the development of Heidegger’s thought, *Beiträge’s* description of the connection between machination and lived-experience is significant in several ways. First, the connection of machination to “lived-experience” both illuminates and problematizes Heidegger’s inheritance of the phenomenological project of the descriptive analysis of experience. Though *Erfahrung* rather than *Erlebnis* is Husserl’s usual word for experience, Heidegger’s use of *Erlebnis* gestures towards the *Leben* of Husserl’s *Lebenswelt* and the temporal primacy of Husserl’s “living present.” With his criticism of “lived-experience” as conjoint and coeval with machination, Heidegger seems to turn decisively against his teacher’s attempt to reduce the abstracted and ramified conceptual network of scientific knowledge to its foundation in actual experience. In *The Crisis of European Sciences*, Husserl had undertaken the *epoche* or “bracketing” of the world of scientific abstraction in order to uncover its foundation in the actually lived world of unabstracted experience. The current crisis of European culture itself, Husserl had complained, arises from a certain overdevelopment or technization in modern science that has led to a forgetfulness of this foundation. The scientific abstraction that Husserl criticizes bears many similarities to Heidegger’s “machination”: both arise as a total, all-engulfing framework of conceptualization and calculation; both injuriously neglect the historical origin and basis of this framework. But if, as Heidegger says, machination and lived-experience arise together as what is not ownmost to being, there is

no hope for Husserl's revitalizing return to a foundation in lived-experience. The apparent forgottenness of this foundation in the development of the modern scientific outlook is only apparent, the echo of the more fundamental forgottenness of being that inaugurates Western philosophy.

Second, and more broadly, Heidegger's identification and critique of the connection between machination and lived-experience mark his most direct rejection of a range of projects in the nineteenth-century philosophy of subjectivity, projects that identified subjectivity with "life" and saw "lived experience" as the vital foundation for all aesthetic and cultural productions. Heidegger must certainly have had in mind, for instance, Dilthey's repeated invocation, throughout his "philosophy of world-views," of the subjective, lived-experience of the individual thinker as the basis for any possible philosophy or artistic creation.²² A decade earlier, in *Being and Time*, Heidegger had already criticized the orientation of Dilthey's investigations toward the problematic of "life," suggesting that although Dilthey's philosophy contains an "inexplicit" tendency toward fundamental clarification, this tendency cannot be fulfilled by it, for the philosophical orientation which begins with the life and lived-experience of individual persons (and here, Heidegger identifies not only Dilthey, but also Husserl, Bergson, and Scheler as adherents to this orientation) still cannot raise the question of the *being* of the person.²³ As early as *Being and Time*, therefore, Heidegger begins to develop a critique of *Erlebnis* that also aims to criticize the prevailing "anthropologicistic" or humanistic philosophy of subjectivity, and indeed the entire subjective/objective contrast that it presupposes. But it is not until the *Beiträge* that Heidegger develops this critique fully, connecting the rise of lived-experience explicitly to the rise of anthropological thinking in philosophy, and situating both against the background of the growing dominance of machination and technology.²⁴

More broadly, in his later thought, Heidegger sees no way to surpass the modern idea of subjectivity while remaining within the confines of any existing notion of the "human." The critique of subjectivity he undertakes is therefore, as he says, simultaneously a critique of "anthropologism" and every "human"-centered way of thinking. In *Beiträge*, Heidegger finds that the emergence of lived-experience, and its totalization as the universal category of the "experienceable," "demands and consolidates the anthropological way of thinking."²⁵ For in connection with the identification of all kinds of things and happenings as graspable through "lived-experience," the human being is defined as the *animal rationale*. The definition begins by defining the human purely biologically, in terms of its animal "life," and then subsequently adding the determination of rationality, which then can only, Heidegger avers, be understood as a capacity for representing objects and contents of thought within a subjective self-consciousness.²⁶ Lived-experience, then, inaugurates and confirms the prevailing anthropologicistic conception of humankind as *animal rationale*. It does so by restricting "beings" to a certain limited range, the range of beings that are representable

as “lived through lived-experience.” It makes the livability of any being as an experienced representation the criterion of its being altogether, and thereby restricts being to objectivity, understood as set over against subjectivity. The movement of this restriction is that of a pre-delineation, a pre-structuring of the totality of beings to guarantee their representability as objects, their livability in experience, and their comprehensibility to rational man. In the pre-delineation of beings as a whole, lived-experience and experienceability become the univocal standard of their being.

On the basis of this pre-delineation of beings as possible objects of experience and representation for subjects, “man” is conceived as the *animal rationale* and the realm of beings as essentially consisting of objects of representation open to his rational knowing. Lived-experience and the notion of “objectivity” are linked in their historical arising; moreover, the more that objectivity is developed as the realm of the existence of whatever is, the more that it demands subjective lived-experience as its criterion and standard. Machination and lived-experience, then, come to prominence together, in modern times, when every event and object comes to be understood as material for the experience of the experiencing subject, and hence subject to the pre-delineation imposed by a framework of possible representation and representability. This pre-delineated framework is what Heidegger would later call *Gestell* or “enframing,” the essence of technology itself according to the late essay “The Question Concerning Technology.”²⁷ Its imposition leads to the interpretation of all beings as measurable and calculable, and to the growth and furtherance of the forms of technological creation and manipulation that this universal measurability and calculability makes possible. Heidegger indicates that we can understand the deeper history of this process only by grasping the original, non-quantitative understanding of the nature of beings that reigned at the time of the first beginning. This understanding of nature, not as a particular domain or set of beings, but as the nature of beings themselves, was called *phusis* by the Greeks.

In the *Beiträge* discussion, Heidegger invokes this original understanding of beings as *phusis* without explaining it in any detail; for more insight, we must look to his less esoteric published writings. In the course *Basic Questions of Philosophy*, written contemporaneously with *Beiträge*, Heidegger considers the origin of technology as the origin of *techne*, the Greek term for the particular attitude toward beings that culminates in today’s advanced calculational processes of technological manipulation and control. He finds, though, that *techne* does not originally arise from calculation or the quantitative at all, but rather from a basic attitude of *wonder* at beings in the world. *Phusis* itself is the conception of beings that encounters them from within this attitude of wonder. Given this, original *techne* is already, in a certain sense, a proceeding against *phusis*. But it is not yet the totalizing, world-involving process of modern technology.²⁸

Primordially, *techne* is a perceptual knowledge of beings. Though it does not yet involve the systematic ordering of all beings according to principles,

techne already proceeds “against” beings, trying to “grasp beings as emerging out of themselves in the way they show themselves . . . and, in accord with this, to care for beings themselves and to let them grow, i.e., to order oneself within beings as a whole through productions and institutions.”²⁹ In this “against,” we can already see the roots of the interpretation of beings that is evident in the etymology of the German word for “object”: *Gegenstand*, or, literally, that which stands against. Primordial *techne* will eventually lead to the determination of beings as objects and the oppositional subject/object relationship that characterizes the dominance of machination. But in primordial *techne*, Heidegger finds a more basic “against”; it is the “against” of perceptual knowledge grounded in wonder as a basic disposition. This perceptual knowledge accords with, rather than opposes, the way that beings can show themselves in truth, what Heidegger elsewhere calls *poiesis*.³⁰ Indeed, it implies a procedure “against beings, but in such a way that these themselves precisely show themselves.”³¹ Originally, *techne* is the respectful looking that perceives the being in its self-showing openness. The relationship of man to beings in original *techne* is neither the relationship of particular subject to particular object nor the challenging relationship of man to beings in technology. Instead, it is the appearing of *phusis*, or the self-showing of beings in the resonance and strikingness—the wonder—of their own being.

But although it is itself neither machination nor lived-experience, the primordial seeing of *techne* originates both machination and lived-experience in their togetherness. For although primordial *techne* remains a non-confrontational seeing, the exteriority of *techne* to *phusis* already prepares the objectification of beings and of the dominance of lived-experience as the unified standard of all events and happenings. From the basic proceeding of *techne* “against” *phusis* will emerge the mutually challenging relationship in which lived-experience, as a universal standard of experienceability, pre-delineates beings and prepares them for technological and machinating control. In understanding the phenomenology of originary *techne*, we understand the showing of being in *techne* prior to the forgetting and obscurity of being that transforms *techne* into machination and starts it on the path of total domination of objects. Still, the possibility of this withdrawing of being is already essentially prepared by basic *techne*:

The basic attitude toward *phusis*, *techne*, as the carrying out of the necessity and need of wonder, is at the same time, however, the ground upon which arises *omoiosis*, the transformation of *aletheia* as unconcealedness into correctness. In other words, in carrying out the basic disposition itself there resides the danger of its disturbance and destruction. For in the essence of *techne*, as required by *phusis* itself, as the occurrence and establishment of the unconcealedness of beings, there lies the possibility of arbitrariness, of an unbridled positing of goals and thereby the possibility of escape out of the necessity of the primordial need.³²

The forgetting of being inaugurates machination by covering over the basic need of wonder, the need of the basic attitude that takes beings into respectful consideration and care. Without this basic attunement toward wonder, the prevailing way of revealing beings becomes the correctness of representations rather than their self-showing in original unconcealment, what Heidegger calls *aletheia*. The overall character of beings itself becomes objectivity rather than *phusis*; beings are understood as objects for subjective representation, and the standard of such representation is their universal experienceability in lived-experience.

In the passage, Heidegger also names the origin of this process of forgetting and covering over whereby beings become objects and truth becomes correctness. It is *omoiosis*, or identity. Identity itself is the origin of the “disturbance and destruction” that transforms the original attunement toward beings into one of representation and subjectivity. After the onset of this “disturbance and destruction,” identity plays an essential role in determining the nature of beings, leading ultimately to the determination of the overall character of beings as objectivity and of truth as representational correctness. At first glance, this claim seems puzzling. How could such a thing as identity, surely among the most abstract and contentless of philosophical concepts, play a fundamental role in determining the prevailing conception of the nature of objects and the everyday ways of thinking and operating that arises from this conception? But as we shall see, Heidegger thinks that the thought of identity, and in particular the tautological principle of the self-identity of objects, itself underlies, at the deepest level, the conjoint arising of machination and lived-experience as a universal standard for beings. To see how, though, we must look elsewhere in Heidegger’s corpus.

IV

With the location of the joint origin of lived-experience and machination in original *techne*, the togetherness of these seeming opposites becomes thinkable. In *Beiträge*, Heidegger says also that the thought of the original unity of lived experience and machination “completes the basic thrust of Western history” and essentially prepares our thinking for *Ereignis*. The preparation for *Ereignis* is intelligible as soon as the true character of machination’s echo of the first beginning becomes apparent. This character, in turn, becomes apparent as machination’s origin in primordial *techne*, from which machination and lived-experience arise jointly under the condition of the forgottenness of being. In *Beiträge*, Heidegger specifies, in a distinct but related way, the connection between machination and being’s essential swaying in the first beginning:

Machination and lived-experience are formally [*formelhaft*] the more ordinary version of the formula for the guiding-question of Western thinking: beingness (being) and thinking (as re-presenting com-prehending).³³

This formula recalls the fragment of Parmenides that Heidegger investigates in several of his later texts, most significantly *Identity and Difference* and *What is Called Thinking*:

τὸ γὰρ ἀντὸ νοεῖν ἐστὶν τε καὶ εἶναι

This fragment, Heidegger says in *What is Called Thinking*, is usually translated as:

“For it is the same thing to think and to be.”

This saying of Parmenides captures, according to Heidegger, “the basic theme of all of Western-European thinking.”³⁴ It echoes in Kant’s identification of the conditions for the possibility of experience with the conditions for the possibility of the objects of experience, and in Hegel’s “Being is Thinking.” But the *to auto*, or sameness, of the Parmenides fragment is not *omoiosis*, or identity, even though sameness and identity are often treated as interchangeable in the tradition of Western metaphysics.³⁵ Indeed, one of the most basic foundations of Western thinking, Heidegger suggests, can begin to come to light if we can understand the difference between this sameness and this identity.

In *Identity and Difference*, Heidegger explores the implications of the principle of identity: $A = A$. This principle, Heidegger says, is itself a keynote of Western thought. It asserts the sameness of each particular thing with itself. But rather than simply rest with this seemingly self-evident principle, Heidegger proceeds to inquire into its hidden ground:

Sameness implies the relation of “with,” that is, a mediation, a connection, a synthesis: the unification into a unity. This is why throughout the history of Western thought identity appears as unity.³⁶

Throughout the history of Western thought, identity has been considered in connection with unity: what is self-identical is unified with itself. But this relationship of the thing with itself becomes more than simple unity as the Western tradition progresses. In the speculative idealism of Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, Heidegger suggests, self-identity, understood in terms of the selfhood of the subject, becomes articulated as a complex process of self-relation.³⁷ What is decisive for the possibility of speculative idealism is the possibility of seeing the self’s relationship of self-identity as one that is capable of mediation, and thus one that can exist and develop in a variety of different ways. With this notion of mediated self-identity, the original principle of identity comes to bear a philosophical weight that brings to completion its historical itinerary. If we can think of the “is” of the proposition “A is A” not as a purely abstract relation of unity, but as an expression of being itself, Heidegger suggests, we can understand how the principle of identity expresses an ancient and guiding determination of the nature of beings:

For the proposition really says: “A is A.” What do we hear? With this “is,” the principle tells us how every being is, namely: it itself is the same with itself. The principle of identity speaks of the Being of beings.

As a law of thought, the principle is valid only insofar as it is a principle of Being that reads: To every being as such there belongs identity, the unity with itself.

What the principle of identity, heard in its fundamental key, states is exactly what the whole of Western European thinking has in mind—and that is: the unity of identity forms a basic characteristic in the Being of beings. Everywhere, wherever and however we are related to beings of every kind, we find identity making its claim on us.³⁸

Western thought, repeatedly and foundationally, asserts the unity of identity (*die Einheit der Identität*). In speaking the unity of identity and the identity of the same, it seeks to subject beings to the basic law that determines the identity of any object. This basic law, in turn, predetermines the field of possible beings, making possible the pre-delineation of the world that is then accomplished by the dominance of machination and lived-experience. When the formal identity of “A is A” is understood as the selfhood of a self, it makes the self-identical self of Hegel, Fichte, and Schelling the center and locus of this pre-delineation. Subjective experience becomes the universal and universalizing standard for the nature of beings. Lived-experience emerges along with machination as the total systematicity enabled by the application of the self-identity of the experiencing subject to the law-bound world of objects.

In originary *techne*, by contrast, *noein* is not thinking as representing or calculating, but as the basic attitude of a perceptual knowing grounded in the attunement of wonder and the understanding of beings as *phusis*. Under the condition of the forgottenness of being, sameness (*to auto*) becomes identity (*omoiosis*) and *noein* becomes thinking in the sense of Kant and Hegel. In this development, the originary sameness of thinking (as *noein*) and being (*estin*) becomes the technological challenging-forth of beings and the standard of lived-experience that makes it possible. But the connection of machination and lived-experience continues to pose a form of the “guiding-question of Western thinking.” For by understanding of the connection of machination and lived-experience, we begin to grasp the meaning of Parmenides’ fragment, and thereby to understand the meaning of being at the “first beginning” of history, from which understanding we can begin to prepare for the “other beginning” of *Ereignis*.

V

In 1930, six years before Heidegger began writing his *Beiträge*, Wittgenstein wrote the following as part of the introduction to his planned *Philosophical Remarks*:

This book is written for such men as are in sympathy with its spirit. This spirit is different from the one which informs the vast stream of European and American civilization in which all of us stand. *That* spirit expresses itself in an onwards movement, in building ever larger and more complicated structures; the other in striving after clarity and perspicuity in no matter what structure. The first tries to grasp the world by way of its periphery—in its variety; the second at its centre—in its essence. And so the first adds one construction to another, moving on and up, as it were, from one stage to the next, while the other remains where it is and what it tries to grasp is always the same.³⁹

Wittgenstein's thought, like Heidegger's, explores the relationship between lived-experience and machination in order to issue a deep challenge to the prevalence of the guiding metaphysical idea of the self-identity of the same. The attitude Wittgenstein critiques in the *Remarks*, the spirit of onward and upward movement, is the attitude of machination. And Wittgenstein's critique of the metaphysical picture of the rule, as developed in the *Philosophical Investigations*, aims at the essence of what is "always the same" through an investigation of the same connection of machination and lived-experience that Heidegger discovers in the course of his own thought.

In critiquing the constructional spirit "which informs the vast stream of European and American civilization," Wittgenstein may well have had in mind the constructional project of Carnap's *Der Logische Aufbau der Welt*, published just two years previously. In *Aufbau*, Carnap had outlined an optimistic and utopian project of epistemological "construction" of the scientific world:

If we allot to the individual in philosophical work as in the special sciences only a partial task, then we can look with more confidence into the future: in slow careful construction insight after insight will be won. Each collaborator contributes only what he can endorse and justify before the whole body of his co-workers. Thus stone will be carefully added to stone and a safe building will be erected at which each following generation can continue to work.⁴⁰

The constructional project of the *Aufbau* aims to display the epistemological structure of science by revealing the concepts of science as logical constructions from basic, uninferred entities. According to Carnap's conception, science itself is a network of logical relations, a unified field of logically interrelated propositions. The relationality of this total network, Carnap suggests, is the condition for the possibility of objectivity itself:

Now, the fundamental thesis of construction theory ... which we will attempt to demonstrate in the following investigation, asserts that fundamentally there is only one object domain and that each scientific statement is about the objects in this domain. Thus, it becomes unnecessary

to indicate for each statement the object domain, and the result is that *each scientific statement can in principle be so transformed that it is nothing but a structure statement*. But this transformation is not only possible, it is imperative. For science wants to speak about what is objective, and whatever does not belong to the structure but to the material (i.e. anything that can be pointed out in a concrete ostensive definition) is, in the final analysis, subjective.⁴¹

Carnap's conception of objectivity as the form of relational description of science, in connection with his utopian ambitions for construction theory, manifests the key elements of Heidegger's description of machination. The logical form of objectivity is the pre-delineated field of law-bound relations among objects, explainable in virtue of their submission to this pre-delineation. As Heidegger suggests, this lawful pre-delineation is itself, according to Carnap, the essential condition for the possibility of objectivity. In the logical field of propositional relations, the totality of beings is subject to explainability and reducibility. Moreover, Carnap's project essentially involves the connection between this machinational pre-delineation and lived-experience as a universal standard. For the epistemologically illuminating reconstruction of a scientific concept reduces it to its basis in *immediate lived experiences, Erlebnisse* or "erlebs." In Carnap's picture, therefore, the correlate of the total field of objectivity is the standard of experienceability by a subject. Objectivity is possible only on the basis of the formalizability of all lived-experiences, their regimentation in a total web of scientific explanation. With this relation, Carnap's picture inherits Kant's identification of the conditions of being (as objectivity) with the conditions of possible experience (as subjectivity); and he situates these conditions explicitly within a total pre-delineated world-picture of unitary explanation.⁴²

Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* critiques the joint configuration of machinational, technical thinking and subjective lived-experience in two interrelated movements, the so-called "rule-following considerations" and the "private language argument." As is well known, the argument against private language attempts to show the incoherence of the idea of a subjective language, particular to one person, in virtue of which she could name her essentially private sensations or experiences. It shows the incoherence of this idea by showing that such naming would be in a certain sense idle or empty, that it could do nothing to give the name a stable relationship to its bearer if this relationship were not already determined by its complex role in the entirety of a human life. In Heidegger's language, the critique of private language shows that no standard of lived-experience, no criterion of experienceability-by-a-subject, can do the work of authorizing the total pre-delineation of a unified field of objectivity and explainability of beings, as it appears to do on Carnap's picture.

The target of Wittgenstein's critique has it in common with the target of Heidegger's critique, in particular, that it presents the referential connection

between a “word” and its “object” as forged by the fixation of a particular mental image or symbol in the mind of a subject of experience. The assumption of such a connection determines the fundamental relationship of thinking to its objects as one of representation, and hence (as Heidegger would point out) as a mode of presence, a substitution of image for thing in the interiority of the subject. The conception was, as we have already seen, a primary target of analytic philosophy’s linguistically based critique of psychologism, even before Wittgenstein’s determinate and extended application of it to the problems of “rule-following” and “private language.” In the opening pages of the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein seeks to loosen its hold by reminding us of the various types of words (not only nouns and verbs) that make up a language, and of the vast and scarcely delimitable heterogeneity of their ways of functioning in a language as a whole.⁴³ With this reminder, Wittgenstein calls into question, on linguistic grounds, the picture that sets the subjectivity of experience against the objectivity of things, where such objectivity is determined, first and foremost, in terms of a subject’s capacity of making *reference* to particular things.

In place of the picture that determines the fundamental character of language as that of representation, and so consolidates the logic that sets subjective experience off over against the objectivity of objects, Wittgenstein seeks to remind us of the irreducible complexity of the functioning of various types of words in the various contexts of a human life. His special terms of art for this complex integration and the unities they make up—“language-games” and “forms of life”—do not refer to specific, theoretically representable unities of practice or activity. Rather, they express the variety and complexity of this integration of language into human life and the multiplicity of its modes. In relation to the human life of whose possibilities these linguistic modes are so many expressions, language itself is nothing like a possession. With the concrete reminder of the multiplicity and complexity of the varieties of usage and their integration into human life, the ancient definition of the human as *zoon logon echon* (the animal having language) lapses, as it does in a different way in Heidegger’s critique. For both philosophers, the availability of language to life can no longer be specified as that of a present object simply open to the theoretical gaze. The essential and revealing withdrawal of language from this gaze shows the inherent ambiguity and unavoidable complexity of the everyday relation of life to the language that articulates its most definitive possibilities, the ambiguous and open space of the *application* of language to everyday life.

For Heidegger as well as for Wittgenstein, the experience that most directly reveals the inherent complexities of the relationship of language to life is indeed that of the *failure* of language, of the “running up against” its boundaries that Wittgenstein saw as the characteristic expression of a fundamental and typical human desire.⁴⁴ Where these boundaries are encountered in the form of the failure of language, we gain, according

to Heidegger, a certain kind of insight into the character of language itself. This insight shows us the underlying reasons for our pervasive failure, within the ordinary realm of language and its possibilities of expression, to bring to light the essential character of the deepest determinants of our being. The early Wittgenstein, in a revealingly parallel way, identified “the limits of my language” with “the limits of my world” and called the feeling of contemplating the world “as a limited whole” the “mystical.”⁴⁵ Near the end of the *Tractatus*, he also identifies the “mystical” with the “inexpressible” that can only be shown and never said.⁴⁶ As for Heidegger, the revelation of this “inexpressible” beyond is marked most of all by the linguistic experience of language’s own boundaries in the privative mode of silence, by the necessary silence that one must preserve “whereof one cannot speak.”⁴⁷

Yet where are the “boundaries of language,” and what does the analytic tradition’s recurrent failure to fix them in the form of an explicit theoretical description reveal about the complexities of their figuring in a human life? As we have already seen, for the late Wittgenstein as well as the author of the *Tractatus*, the critical or reflective work of tracing the boundaries of sense in the linguistic performances of everyday conversation or action cannot and does not culminate in the specification of a single, univocal set of criteria capable of drawing a fixed line between sense and nonsense in the practice of a language as a whole. In the idiom of the *Tractatus*, any such statement undermines itself, as soon as it is stated, by revealing itself as nonsense. In that of the *Investigations*, any propositional expression of criteria meant to determine the bounds of sense still leaves open the further critical question of the application of *that* expression in practice. With the *Investigations*’ detailed critical consideration of rule-following, the access to language that we constantly presuppose, and practice with every word and gesture, is shown to be incapable of explication in terms of any fixed set of rules or standards. Rather, our constant recourse to language is a paradoxical deliverance to what can never appear as an object, given to the theoretical gaze that would account for it or in the ordinary practice that would be determined by it.⁴⁸ Synthesizing the rhetoric of Wittgenstein and Heidegger, we might say: our most everyday experiences of language, of its successes as well as its failures, its capacities for revealing as well as what it hides, mark the ordinary occasions of our recourse to it with the extraordinariness of the unresolved mystery of language’s being itself.

VI

In the context of the late Wittgenstein’s project of perspicuously viewing the actual use of our language in order to clear up philosophical confusions, the concept of a *rule* emerges as a particular point of difficulty. When discussing rules, he argues, we are particularly tempted to misinterpret the grammar of our language, giving it an interpretation that it does not bear. We may particularly

be tempted to invoke rules when we are tempted to establish and explain the submission of beings to the possibility of overall explanation and clarification. Explanatory projects like Carnap's, for instance, make the rule-based and law-bound character of beings the basis of their total explainability and characterizability in the objective terms of scientific description and explanation. In reminding us of the actual character of our language of rule-following, Wittgenstein shows the failure of this metaphysical use of rules to establish its own ground. He shows us that the metaphysical interpretation according to which beings are submitted to a unified regime of explanation insofar as they are rule-bound fails to accomplish its goal, because it conceals its own origin in what is actually a fiction, a mythology of the regular self-identity of the rule across the infinite diversity of the circumstances of its application.

Considered in connection with Heidegger's thought, the concept of a rule again has a special and basic significance. For the rule, in the basic picture of machination, is the most essential condition under which a subject's experience can act as standard and criterion for the object. Only in virtue of a rule-bound pre-delineation of beings does the self-identical subject guarantee the submission of the range of beings, as objects of representation, to its thinking. In the self-identity of the rule, the self-identity of the subject itself is made the standard of the world of objects; for it is the universal applicability of the rule that establishes the possibility of the pre-delineation of the world as explainable in relational, causal, and lawbound terms. The universality of the rule, then, licenses the projection of the assumed self-identity of the subject into the assumption of the lawbound unity of the world of objects, guaranteeing the fundamental comprehensibility of all objects by guaranteeing their universal experienceability. It is this claim for the universality of the rule, its guarantee of infinite application undisturbed by heterogeneity, difference, and particularity, that we may see Wittgenstein's considerations as criticizing in particular.

One specific way that Wittgenstein criticizes the application of the idea of rules in projects like Carnap's is to remind us of the close connection between the use of the concept of the "rule" and the concept of the "same:"

223. One does not feel that one has always got to wait upon the nod (the whisper) of the rule. On the contrary, we are not on tenterhooks about what it will tell us next, but it always tells us the same, and we do what it tells us.

One might say to the person one was training: "Look, I always do the same thing: I. . . ."

224. The word "agreement" and the word "rule" are *related* to one another, they are cousins. If I teach anyone the use of the one word, he learns the use of the other with it.

225. The use of the word "rule" and the use of the word "same" are interwoven. (As are the use of "proposition" and the use of "true").

Under the pressure of the demand to explain what it is to follow a rule, our natural temptation is to explain the rule in terms of the identity of the same. We think of the rule as a self-identical structure that *repeats itself infinitely* by *telling us the same* at every stage. The rule, we are tempted to think, “always tells us the same, and we do what it tells us.”⁴⁹

To see more clearly the philosophical temptation at the root of the line of thought that Wittgenstein is criticizing, we may consider the following sequence:

2 4 6 8 10 ...

Having given the partial sequence, we might attempt to give the rule of the series: it is “add two.” The rule itself can be thought of as a finite item. But when we think of the rule as the metaphysical item that generates the series, we think of it repeating itself infinitely. As we apply the rule to generate more of the series, we do the same thing again and again. We can do so because the rule itself remains the same. The rule itself is not affected by the conditions of its application. The self-identity of the rule guarantees the sameness of each of its infinite applications.⁵⁰

According to the thinking that Wittgenstein criticizes, then, to follow a rule consistently or correctly is to do the same thing, again and again, ignoring or leaving no room for any possible heterogeneity of instances of its possible application and development. The assurance provided by this characterization, however, blinds us to the complex relationship of our concrete acts of rule-following to the particular contexts of their occurrence. Attempting to explain, rather than describe, what it is to follow a rule, we picture to ourselves the self-identity of an entity the same with itself in all of its instances. It is this picturing that underlies the misleading picture of the rule that Wittgenstein criticizes, the picture of the rule as a “rail laid to infinity,” a selfsame, stable bearer of regularity whose only application is infinite repetition.⁵¹ And to advert to the assurance of the rule in explaining our practices of counting and calculating is to advert to the certainty of an idealized process of thought that would be applicable in any situation whatsoever, one that would make the subject the self-identical thinker of the same in any circumstance or context. Accordingly, it is to dissimulate in advance the varieties of difference, found in the openness of the horizon of possible applications of a rule, that could subvert its underlying stability and disrupt the ideal certainty of this ideal subject.

The “rule-following considerations” problematize this metaphysical picture of the rule by posing a paradox.⁵² The paradox shows that the metaphysical description of the rule—the description according to which the rule repeats the identity of the same—fails to afford us the explanation it seems to. For as long as the rule is thought metaphysically, any application of the rule still needs another explanation. The rule, thought metaphysically, needs an interpretation in order to be applied at all; but then the interpretation

itself must be interpreted, and so on. The self-identical rule, meant to guarantee the certainty of the self-identical subject in applying a universal standard of experience to all beings, falls short of this guarantee exactly where it is called upon to interact with the subject. No metaphysical item—no self-identical agent of infinite repetition—can explain what we call “following a rule” in the particular cases in which we appeal to that notion.

VII

With his *Beiträge* critique of the joint configuration of machination and lived-experience, Heidegger joins Wittgenstein in exposing and criticizing the pervasive determination of modern “forms of life” and conceptions of its subject through forms of metaphysics that are inscribed ceaselessly in the everyday expressions of our language itself.⁵³ The underlying basis of the critique, for both philosophers, lies in their sustained considerations of the nature of language, of the possibilities it brings to light or constrains, and of the ambiguity of our lived relation to it. In both philosophers’ treatments, this ambiguity is shown in the experience of language’s withdrawal from the forms of description that would bring it to light as an object, that would clarify its fundamental mode of being and thereby display its relationship to the living being that speaks. This experience of the withdrawal of language from the positive description of its essential mode of being is also, as we have seen over the last several chapters, a regular and repeated experience of the analytic tradition that undertakes explicitly the analysis and description of language’s structure. It makes evident the determination of ordinary forms of action and practice by unargued metaphysical conceptions of language, meaning, and identity. In so doing, it opens the critique that interrogates these practices on the basis of the ambiguity of their own linguistic ground, and so might perhaps open the possibility of a life purged of the forms of violence and mystification to which they lead.

Analytic philosophers are likely to be suspicious, with some justice, of the determinative role in Heidegger’s inquiry of the question of the expressibility of “being itself.” The characteristic Heideggerian narrative of the successive withdrawing of this ill-defined “object,” with its eschatological hopes for a future return, inscribes Heidegger’s critical aims within a framework that we may see as both nostalgic and historically totalizing in ways that analytic philosophers, typically suspicious of such grand narratives, may certainly wish to resist. But the central object of Heidegger’s analysis of the origin of the linguistic forms of metaphysics—our standing tendency to take language as a present being, as an unproblematic possession of the human animal and so as wholly under the control of its power of thought—is readily recognizable in the specific forms of language, and pictures of the life of its speaker; that the analytic tradition also repeatedly interrogates. Whatever the effects or forms of its historical development, this tendency to treat words as the possessions of a thinking subjectivity

that inscribes the possibilities of their use in advance is present wherever and whenever, in human discourse, the question of the meaning of a word, or its significant employment in the course of a life, is explicitly raised or implicitly foreclosed. The critique that exposes the ambiguity of its objectification of language does not depend on any determinate or positive conception of the “nature of being” or the prospects for its influence over the course of history, for it demonstrates this ambiguity in the everyday life of language itself. It exposes the failure of the thinking, experiencing subject, and of the rule-governed forms of regularity it inscribes, to master the open possibilities of language’s everyday use.

It has been evident for several decades that the possibility of gaining a clear understanding of the significance of linguistic reflection for twentieth-century philosophy, and with it perhaps as well the possibility of a genuine reconciliation of analytic and continental philosophy, depends in significant measure on gaining a clear sense of the parallels and convergences between the very different critical projects of Heidegger and Wittgenstein. Many commentators have speculated on these convergences, but relatively few have placed them within the context of a larger consideration of the implications of the basic inquiry into the nature and structure of language that both philosophers actually undertook.⁵⁴ Within the scope of “analytic” readings, interpretation of the significance of Heidegger’s thought has furthermore regularly been vitiated by a prominent and influential misreading which, portraying him as a “social pragmatist” theorist of the practical basis of the disclosure of beings in the world, tends to obscure the deep and ever-growing significance of the question of language for his most central concerns.⁵⁵ Their explicit setting within the scope of this question reveals the ongoing relevance of the common experience of the enigmatic withdrawal of language that Heidegger and Wittgenstein shared, and that still continues to determine our relation to language wherever and whenever it is in question.

8 Language, norms, and the force of reason

The last several chapters have constituted a detailed examination of the concepts and values of “language,” “meaning,” “practice,” and “use,” “rule,” “regularity” and “institution” in the dialectic of analytic philosophy in the twentieth century. At each stage, I have examined the relationship of these concepts with the notion of a language as a total logical, grammatical, or practical structure, and with the ambiguities inherent in an appeal to language that constantly tends to figure it as a structure of signs, while subsequently finding just this structure to be inadequate to account for its own institution, extent, limits, or ultimate guiding principles. In the repeatedly enacted dialectic that I have explored, the attempt to describe or theorize the logical form or structure of language in terms of a *corpus* of analytic rules, principles, or norms has, I have argued, repeatedly been contested by those moments of presence, genesis or institution that resist being included in the structural system of language as simply *another* element or another moment (see Chapter 1). The dialectic has repeated itself consistently, unfolding each time out of the inherent dynamic of the analytic tradition’s founding and originally determinative recourse to language. Language, with almost every resort that the analytic tradition has made of it, then appears ambiguously as an objectively present structure or system, accessible in principle to the schematic resources of a theoretical description of its structure or form; and then again, in its moments of founding principles, limits, or ultimate nature, as something radically transcendent to, mysterious, or problematic for any such accounting.

There are few themes more pervasive in the discourse of analytic philosophy of language today than the invocation of *ordinary lived practices* as the ultimate source of linguistic meaning and intersubjective intelligibility.¹ The appeal to practices figures, in the recent literature, most centrally in projects that attempt to explain the meaningfulness of language as grounded in essentially *public* and *social* practices of communication, deliberation, evaluation and criticism. In many of its versions, it seeks as well to account for the “normative” dimension of language—in other words, for distinctions between correctness and incorrectness in linguistic usage—by reference to the existence or regularity of socially learned and inculcated standards, rules,

or norms. But as I shall argue, this appeal to practices, in most of its formulations, is simply another version of the characteristic and repeated attempt to comprehend language as a total structure, and the force of reason as the force of its rules in application to a human life. In this final historically focused chapter, I shall consider three recent linguistically oriented projects that consider the long-standing question of the force of reason in relation to the forms of our access to the language we speak. Despite superficial similarities, these projects diverge widely, I shall argue, in the ways they construe the force of the better reason as operating to determine thought and action; these divergences mark some of the different contemporary possibilities for taking up the analytic tradition's ongoing critique of linguistic reason, or continuing it in the space of a broader history of critical thought.

I

In his recent text, *Making it Explicit*, Robert Brandom outlines a complex, far-ranging and innovative project of semantic and pragmatic analysis. One of his overriding aims is to make the practical foundation of reason and our practices of reasoning intelligible in a new way by showing how the norms that he sees as governing them can be *socially* instituted and maintained. One of the most urgent aims of the "normative pragmatics" that Brandom develops is to provide an alternative to the "representationalist" view that construes propositional contents as fixed and determined in themselves, independent of their characteristic roles in inferential and communicative practices. Drawing on readings of Kant, Frege, and Wittgenstein, Brandom argues that the norms of reasoning and the contents of concepts are in fact wholly determined by these practices.² Thus, instead of seeing conceptual norms, in the first instance, as rules, laws, or commandments represented *explicitly* in our description of them, we ought to see them as typically *implicit* in our actual social practices of making and attributing judgments and our practical attitudes of treating the judgments that others make as legitimate or illegitimate.³

Following the suggestion of some of Frege's polemics against a psychologistic treatment of logic, Brandom distinguishes sharply between the merely causal consequences of linguistic performances and the distinctive *normative* significance that these exercises take on when they are understood as involving *reasons* and aiming at the *truth*. For Brandom, the first sort of significance is describable from a naturalistic perspective, whereas the second sort is not. In particular, the normativity of reasoning comes into view whenever performances are legitimately assessable as *correct* or *incorrect*.⁴ Norms of reasoning do not, like natural laws, specify what will happen, but rather what ought to happen: which inferences, for example, it is correct to draw from some set of premises or assumptions. This liability to assessments of correctness does not, Brandom argues, adhere to events described purely naturalistically, where what is at issue can be, at best, the

regularity or normalcy of a performance, but there is no legitimate application of the concept of correctness. It is, moreover, distinctive of the peculiar “force” of normative rules in reasoning that we are bound, not by these rules directly, but by our conceptions of them. Normative rules, as opposed to causal ones, have force in determining how we ought to reason only for beings capable of conceiving of them as having this force, and as so conceived. Brandom argues that this demarcates the realm of normativity from the realm of facts and phenomena accessible to explanation in purely naturalistic terms, thereby marking us as the particular kinds of beings we are, responsive not only to natural, but also to rational, force. It is only because our acting on normative rules is dependent upon our recognition or conception of them, our accepting or grasping them, implicitly or explicitly, that we are “denizens of the realm of freedom,” rational agents, at all.⁵

This description of the basis of normativity has its roots in Kant, and has more recently played a central role in a variety of analytic projects that have discussed our “responsiveness to reasons” or the possibility of characterizing our social and linguistic “reasoning practices” as involving commitments to “norms” in a fundamental way.⁶ For these projects, normative entities such as standards or rules are to be distinguished from non-normative ones in that their force in determining what we do depends on our recognition of them as such. By contrast with natural laws or regularities, they are not binding “in themselves,” but only insofar as we can recognize them as binding, or (equivalently) recognize ourselves as bound by them. Their force is not, then, that of the natural laws that compel the movements of bodies, but a categorically distinct kind of rational force that depends on our recognition of it as binding, a recognition that, we may further suppose, is experienced and negotiated primarily in linguistic and social practices of justification, explanation, and evaluation. Its paradigm is the “game of giving and asking for reasons” in which we offer, accept or reject not only particular claims to truth, but also more general criteria for their evaluation and criticism of specific linguistic performances, and so gain clarity about (what we will then take to be) the standards or claims of reason in relation to our world-directed attitudes.

Although Brandom, following Kant, thinks of reasons as (at least potentially) having the form of *rules* governing possibilities of correct or incorrect linguistic performance, it is also one of his overriding goals to argue against an unrestricted “regulism” according to which what makes a performance correct or incorrect is always its relation to an explicit rule or principle.⁷ Though performances can sometimes be evaluated by reference to explicit rules that they violate or comport with, the more usual case is that they are simply treated as correct or incorrect in practice, without any explicit reference to rules or principles. Ordinary attitudes of treating or taking a performance as correct or incorrect, shown in actual behaviors of praise, censure, approval or disapproval are sufficient, according to Brandom, to establish the normative status of a particular performance in a social context. This

kind of normativity is always social, since it depends on the interaction of the performer of an action and those who are in a position to evaluate it, but the evaluation need not wait on the formulation of any explicit principle or rule that underlies it. In this sense, norms are typically *implicit in practice* before they become explicit in a stated principle. The possibility of identifying such implicit norms or “proprieties” of practice is in fact essential to Brandom’s case for the essentially social character of normativity. Such proprieties are “normative statuses—the status a performance has as correct or incorrect according to a rule or practice.”⁸

Brandom’s argument against regulism, and his defense of the implicit/explicit distinction, relies heavily on what he takes to be the main point of the rule-following considerations of Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*. For Wittgenstein as Brandom reads him, the notorious paradox of *PI* 201 poses a general, and insurmountable, problem for the view that all proprieties of practice, all evaluations of practices as correct or incorrect, are dependent on *explicitly represented* rules. For the application of an explicit rule, in a particular case, is itself something that is amenable to evaluation as correct or incorrect. As Brandom puts it, “applying a rule in particular circumstances is itself essentially something that can be done correctly or incorrectly.”⁹ But, then, if all proprieties depended on explicitly represented rules, it would be necessary in each case to determine the application by resorting to another explicitly represented rule, leading to a bottomless infinite regress. The application of each rule, in each case, would depend on the specification of a further rule; since rules cannot interpret themselves, the process of interpretation would be endless. The solution to the paradox, according to Brandom, lies in recognizing the fact that at bottom, the determination of the correctness or incorrectness of a performance is irreducibly *practical*:

The question of the autonomy of the intellectualist conception of norms, presupposed by the claim that rules are the form of the normative, is the question of whether the normative can be understood as “rules all the way down,” or whether *rulish* properties depend on some more primitive sort of *practical* propriety. Wittgenstein argues that the latter is the case. Rules do not apply themselves; they determine correctnesses of performance only in the context of practices of distinguishing correct from incorrect applications of the rules. To construe these practical proprieties of application as themselves rule-governed is to embark on a regress. Sooner or later the theorist will have to acknowledge the existence of practical distinctions between what is appropriate and what not, admitting appropriatenesses according to practice as well as according to rules or explicit principles.¹⁰

For Brandom, then, the solution to the regress paradox that makes trouble for the regulist position that norms must be explicit rules is the recognition

of a more primitive level of normativity implicit in practice. Given primitive proprieties of practice that suffice by themselves to determine individual performances as correct and incorrect, even without an explicit rule, the regress is blocked. For these primitive proprieties, being already ingrained in our practice, are already effective in determining possibilities of evaluation and criticism, whether or not they are ever explicitly formulated. There is no need, in particular cases, for a further explicit formulation of the principles that govern these attitudes, though they remain effective in demarcating correct from incorrect performances in practice.

The interpretive grounds for attributing the full extent of this argument to Wittgenstein are in fact obscure. Wittgenstein himself never suggests a general distinction between “implicit” and “explicit” norms, and indeed only rarely uses the term “normative,” or any of its variants, at all. Indeed, its only appearance in the *Philosophical Investigations* comes in the context of Wittgenstein’s criticism of his earlier view of language as a calculus or a game, a view which he held in writing the *Tractatus*:

81. F. P. Ramsey once emphasized in conversation with me that logic was a “normative science.” I do not know exactly what he had in mind, but it was doubtless closely related to what only dawned on me later: namely, that in philosophy we often *compare* the use of words with games and calculi which have fixed rules, but cannot say that someone who is using a language *must* be playing such a game.¹¹

When the later Wittgenstein does refer to a philosophical operation, comparable to Brandom’s “explicitation,” of showing or bringing to light structures thought to underlie our practical determinations of correctness and incorrectness, he seems to be quite skeptical of the possibility or helpfulness of any such procedure.¹² In any case, in the sections immediately following his invocation of Wittgenstein’s argument, Brandom provides a detailed account of the way in which, according to his theory, the “normative statuses” of various reasoning practices are instituted. According to Brandom, the normative status of any performance is always dependent on more basic evaluative “attitudes” of taking or treating that performance as correct or incorrect. The evaluative attitude of treating a performance as correct or incorrect may itself be adopted in various ways. Most directly, evaluative attitudes are connected to *sanctions*: one treats a performance as incorrect by punishing it, and treats it as correct by rewarding it.¹³ However, Brandom argues that treating a performance as correct or incorrect by negatively or positively sanctioning it must go beyond simply treating it as regular or irregular according to the standards of the community. For genuine normativity, it is essential that positive and negative sanctions adhere to actions that are *correctly* taken to be correct or incorrect, rather than simply to those that are *in fact* taken to be correct or incorrect.¹⁴ Since the attitudes that institute proprieties are in this way themselves normative,

there may be no way to reduce normativity, so described, to any non-normative basis in regularities of practice; the basis of social practices of reasoning may be, as Brandom puts it, “norms all the way down.”

The sanctions that institute and stand behind actual attitudes of approval and disapproval may be as simple as corporal punishment—for instance hitting offenders with sticks—or they may extend to more complex, fully social attitudes and actions, such as extending or restricting permissions or rights. Turning to the particular way in which the force of reason works in intersubjective communicative situations, moreover, it is important to Brandom that the source of sanctions is not, first and foremost, the community itself, but rather its individual members in concrete interlocution. The primary social relation, in which normative evaluations first become possible, is not between the individual and the community but between two individuals. Appreciating this, Brandom argues, is essential to avoiding an “I-we” account of intentionality, one that misleadingly sees the community as itself a source of evaluative attitudes. By affirming that evaluative attitudes, sanctions, and normative statuses occur, first and foremost, in particular communicative situations of interpretation, we can instead, he suggests, uphold a more realistic “I-thou” model of intentionality and rational significance.¹⁵ As Brandom points out, even given community-wide agreement, it still ought to be conceivable that the community is wrong. And this is conceivable, given a social model of reasoning, only if determinations of truth and objectivity are themselves evident, first and foremost, in concrete evaluative attitudes taken in concrete episodes of interlocution, before anything like a “community standard” appears. As Brandom points out, moreover, this makes normative statuses *perspectival* in an important sense: the determination of the concrete commitments of social actors is always made from a particular interpretive perspective.

The implicit/explicit distinction further facilitates the shift away from an abstract, universalizing account of rationality by treating normative standards for correct and incorrect reasoning as implicit in concrete communicative interactions, and demonstrated in the practical attitudes of the participants toward each others’ performances, even if neither party could explicitly formulate them. Nevertheless, despite this significant element of perspectivalism, Brandom thinks of the institution of normativity and indeed the contents of concepts themselves as explicable by reference to the total structure of linguistic and attributional practices that a community is interpretable as engaging in.¹⁶ This commitment to structuralist explicability in terms of social practices is most evident in the context of the other half of Brandom’s project in *Making it Explicit*, the “inferentialist semantics” that is to complement his “normative pragmatics.” According to inferentialism, concepts are determined as having the contents that they do only by their occupying the particular positions that they do in complex networks of propositional inference and deduction. For the inferential semanticist, conceptual contents are therefore defined by the complex network of

formal and material inference rules that govern “moves” from one claim to another, and from explicit claims to intentional actions, in the language as a whole. These rules may of course be largely implicit in practice rather than explicitly formulated; it is the job of rational reflection, in fact, to act as the “organ of linguistic self-consciousness,” bringing what is “implicit in practice” to explicit expression. For Brandom, in particular, the “inferential norms” that govern the use of expressions in everyday practice are conceived as conferring upon these expressions the content that they have. Later, explicitation makes these norms clear and thus displays this content in the context of a general inferentialist description of the structure of content in a language as a whole.¹⁷

As we have seen, Brandom construes Wittgenstein’s argument as challenging the notion that the determination of correctness or incorrectness in concrete interlocution could ever rest wholly on explicit norms or principles, and so as arguing that it must rest instead on norms or proprieties implicit in practice. This leaves out, however, the possibility of construing Wittgenstein as issuing a more radical challenge, one directed against the very attempt to portray normative judgments as depending on structures intelligible as norms or proprieties (no matter how “primitive”) at all. As I shall argue, though, it is just such a challenge that Wittgenstein can indeed be read as issuing; and reading him this way helps to show what is taken for granted in Brandom’s account.

At *PI* 202, Wittgenstein says, apparently in an attempt to resolve the “paradox” of *PI* 201, that “‘obeying a rule’ is a practice”; a few paragraphs earlier, he says that “to obey a rule, to make a report, to give an order, to play a game of chess, are *customs* (uses, institutions).” (*PI* 199). These remarks, as well as Wittgenstein’s scattered references to “forms of life,” have encouraged interpreters in taking him, as Brandom does, to be accounting for the ordinary possibility of following explicitly formulated and consciously recognized rules by reference to more primitive or basic norms, implicit in the “practices” we share. For some commentators, these norms are to be taken as regularities instituted by some form of convention or social agreement; according to others, they depend on the “natural” or biological regularities of human behavior.¹⁸ But another, quite different reading of the significance of these remarks becomes possible when we consider the specific way in which Wittgenstein situates his “appeal” to practices (if such it be) within a broader consideration of the basis and limits of philosophical explanation of the “uses of words” themselves. In seeking to explain how it is that it is possible to follow a rule correctly (to go on as we do), we may easily and naturally be tempted to advert to a basis for our practices in a more fundamental or primitive fact of agreement:

241. “So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false?”—It is what human beings *say* that is true and false; and they agree in the *language* they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life.

242. If language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also (queer as this may sound) in judgments. This seems to abolish [*aufzuheben*] logic, but does not do so.¹⁹

In response to the interlocutor's attempt to reduce truth and falsity to such a fact of "human agreement," Wittgenstein responds by adverting to the even more basic fact of "agreement" in the *language* that we use. He explicitly distinguishes this kind of agreement from agreement on "opinions" or beliefs, and further calls it agreement "in form of life." This kind of "agreement," which is not an agreement on opinions or beliefs, and so is not a matter of sharing interpretations of facts, holding common creeds, or the like, is nevertheless pervasively *shown* in ordinary life, in what we call "following a rule," "responding to an order," "going on in the same way," and so on. When these ordinary phenomena occur, the "basis" of their possibility is not ordinarily called into question; we take it for granted, by and large, that others who share our language will go on as we do. But when it does come into question, we will respond by appealing to the fact of agreement that is (perhaps only now) perspicuous as having existed all along, the ground of our sharing a language or a way of life. Such agreement can have the force of reminding our interlocutor of her commitments to such shared routes of significance and patterns of judgment, of what she already knows but may have forgotten, of what actions or decisions we may perceive her life, as she has lived it before us, as committing her to as she goes on to live it.

Despite differences in emphasis, Brandom can take most of these points in stride; indeed, it is almost impossible, once we have taken Wittgenstein to be *theorizing* meaning in terms of something like "practices," to resist interpreting the fact of "agreement in judgments" that he cites as the fact of our sharing a broad range of specific and describable "linguistic practices," including centrally, but not limited to, our practices of judging and evaluating the linguistic performances of others. As is well known, though, Wittgenstein has deeply seated animadversions, in general, against conceptions of the task of philosophy as consisting in explanation or theory at all. Even more decisive in the present context is his specific critical sense of the relevant force of appeals to "agreement," whether in the course of ordinary discourse or philosophical explanation.²⁰ The "agreement" that we share in sharing a language, he makes clear in the passages where he more closely considers the ordinary sites and implications of our appeal to it, is not itself to be understood or explained, in general, in terms of any more basic set of facts or phenomena, not even more basic normative attitudes or proprieties of practice.

This becomes clear, especially, in Wittgenstein's consideration of what is called going on in the "same" way, for instance in completing a series of numbers or using a word in new cases. Where an interlocutor's performances are recognized as deviant with respect to the standard we take ourselves to be committed to, we will ordinarily criticize them as failing to go on in the

“same” way we do. But such criticism, Wittgenstein makes clear, is not itself based on any criterion or standard of “sameness” more basic than the fact of agreement itself. The uses of the words “agreement,” “same” and “rule” are indeed, he says, deeply interwoven, both in the teaching of practices and their criticism.²¹ But this interweaving is not such as to confer priority on any one of the notions they express, in relation to the others. The appeal that we may be tempted to make, in response to a recognizably deviant performance, to the “sameness” of a way of applying a rule or a way of going on in the completion of a series or the use of a word, is also, irreducibly, an appeal to the simple fact of our acting the way that we do; it does not adduce deeper explanatory grounds for this fact, but simply gives expression to it.²² In particular, the appeal to “sameness” in explaining what we do, or criticizing the performance of an interlocutor who fails to do this, does not itself adduce any grounds for our agreement in practice that are deeper than that agreement itself. Our appeal to it cannot, therefore, in general, sustain a retrospective description of those explicit standards and rules that we are later in a position to present ourselves as agreeing in, as having been implicitly present in our practices all along.

Of course, we may make this appeal, in ordinary life as well as in special contexts of philosophical theorizing. Where an interlocutor or a learner fails to go on in the expected way, to do what we do, to follow the rule that he seemed to understand in the way that (as we understand) it must be followed, we may appeal to the fact of that which he shares with us, the understanding that he already manifested in his performances before, the regularities or proprieties that he already showed in the previous instances of his practice. But as Wittgenstein’s rule-following paradox itself brings to the fore, any such appeal may itself be variously understood or understood (as we shall say) wrongly. It may then yield a performance that is, by our lights, deviant; we may then criticize the performance, censure its performer, repeat our demand for him to recognize what he shares with us. Wittgenstein’s paradox, in its most general form, calls upon us to account for our making, and enforcing, this demand by reference to some formulable item or basis that we can cite as underlying it. Its critical upshot is that no such item or describable basis can do so. We are, in practice, thrown back upon repeating the demand itself, and nothing can guarantee its satisfaction in any case.

In the passages in which he considers most closely what is involved in our evaluation of certain responses, as opposed to others, as being “normal” or “natural,” Wittgenstein emphasizes the specificity of the surroundings in which such evaluations themselves “normally” occur, and against the backdrop of which they function. For instance, at *PI* 143, he considers the various possibilities of a learner’s response in a language-game that involves writing down “series of signs according to a certain formation rule”:

143. ... And here we may imagine, e.g., that he does copy the figures independently, but not in the right order: he writes sometimes one

sometimes another at random. And then communication stops at *that* point.—Or again, he makes “*mistakes*” in the order.—The difference between this and the first case will of course be one of frequency.—Or he makes a *systematic* mistake; . . . Here we shall almost be tempted to say that he has understood *wrong*.

Notice, however, that there is no sharp distinction between a random mistake and a systematic one. That is, between what you are inclined to call “random” and what “systematic.”

Perhaps it is possible to wean him from the systematic mistake (as from a bad habit). Or perhaps one accepts his way of copying and tries to teach him ours as an offshoot, a variant of his.—And here too our pupil’s capacity to learn may come to an end.

In ordinary cases of learning, the pupil can be brought, relatively easily and by means of the relevant training, to do what we do, to go on in the right way; but Wittgenstein’s point here is that nothing guarantees that this must always be possible. The pupil’s capacity to learn may always come to an end; and when it does, there may be nothing more to which we can appeal to ensure her future agreement. And this possibility of breakdown, the possibility of my being unable to find grounds for demanding agreement, or of my grounds failing to appeal to the other, affects in an essential way anything we should call an explanation of my justification for my following the rule as I do:

217. “How am I able to obey a rule?”—if this is not a question about causes, then it is about the justification for my following the rule in the way I do.

If I have exhausted the justifications I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: “This is simply what I do.”²³

The point here is closely related to the earlier one about the role of appeals to agreement, judgments of sameness, and applications of “identity” in the ordinary cases in which we evaluate and criticize linguistic performances. It is that explicitly cited grounds for these appeals and judgments may fail to motivate in any case, and that when they do so fail, nothing need necessarily ensure that the learner will indeed go on in the right way. Here, any appeals to norms implicitly shared in practice will be just as idle, and just as little capable of ensuring agreement, as the appeal to explicitly stated norms or agreements that it replaces.

Thus, far from demanding, as Brandom takes it, that norms made explicit in reflection be construed as having a basis in inexplicit but nevertheless normative proprieties of practice, Wittgenstein’s rule-following paradox, read in this general way, poses a much deeper-seated threat to the project of a socially based inferentialist semantics than Brandom can see. For it effectively challenges the thought that the motivating force of reasons in

ordinary conversation can ultimately be explained, in the course of a general explanation of the possibility of communication, by reference to anything “implicit in practices” at all. The appeal to commonalities of response or underlying agreements may fail in any case; and in each case where it does fail, an appeal to the existence of a shared practice can do no better. If this possibility of failure is indeed always present, indeed, then there are in general no such things as univocal standards or norms that are silently present, determining correctness and incorrectness even where there is, as yet, no explicit standard. It is an essential feature of our ordinary discourse that it may always, and sometimes in fact does, “bottom out” in the “bed-rock” of which Wittgenstein speaks, that the chain of reasons may always come to an end. But when bedrock is reached, in the interlocutor’s continued (as we may put it, “stubborn”) failure to see what I see, her refusal to find grounds in what I say for going on as I do, as I say she must, my further appeal to proprieties implicit in the practices we share, to common routes of judgment or standards for evaluation that we must share insofar as we share a language at all, goes and can go no further than my appeal to this bare fact of our sharing a language itself. Here, one might say, there is no longer any question of accounting for the incorrectness of the interlocutor’s performance. For the normal surroundings of commonality that provide so much as the possibility of accounting for the performance as correct or incorrect have failed. I will then be inclined, as Wittgenstein says, simply to repeat the fact of my practice, of my grounds and of my ways of going on. Since I can no longer see these ways as determining, or necessitating, the performance of the other, I can in the end only point again to it, repeating my appeal to the legitimacy of my way only, this time, by demonstratively indicating its bare existence.

The bedrock of which Wittgenstein speaks *can* always be reached, in the order of practice. But it is one of the implications of the rule-following paradox that it is reached, in the order of explanation, whenever we try to give a general account, in terms of more primitive (implicit or explicit) underlying “norms,” proprieties, or standards, of what we suppose to be the practical “basis” of the fact of our using language at all. Most directly, of course, the paradox bears against the picture that takes our linguistic action to be everywhere determined by underlying and describable rules. Given this picture, it shows that since “any course of action can be made out to accord with the rule,” no course of action can actually be presented as determined by it.²⁴ Once we realize the generality of this paradox and the extent of the problem it represents, the picture of our ordinary practices as governed everywhere by describable rules is visible as a “mythological” description of our practice. No such description, in particular, can account for the fact that we go on in the way we do, since no appeal to rules can adduce grounds more basic than this fact itself for supposing that it must hold.²⁵ But if the appeal to explicit rules cannot explain what is involved in our practice, than neither can, for similar reasons, the appeal to inexplicit proprieties of practice

that Brandom makes. Within the course of a general attempt to explain the possibility of communication or account for the possibility of criticizing the performances of others, the mythology of implicit proprieties of practice is in fact little different from the mythology of rules that Wittgenstein most directly opposes. If, as I have argued, the fact of agreement is not explicable in terms of anything more basic of itself, to talk of a standard or a norm here, even an implicit one, is to commit a grammatical confusion; it is to presuppose a metaphysical picture of our binding to a linguistic, grammatical or “pragmatic” structure that cannot survive Wittgenstein’s staging of the self-undermining fantasy of constraint upon which it relies.

Thus, in Wittgenstein’s consideration of what is involved in “following a rule,” the ordinary and hardly eliminable possibility of communication breaking down in *any* case can be seen to pose a pervasive general problem for any accounting that, like Brandom’s, seeks to explain our usual agreement in ways of going on by reference to more primitive features of practice, even those that are not yet “explicit” in reflection or judgment. The explanatory project founders, in particular, at the point of bedrock, where the simple fact of my action is no longer explicable in terms of anything more basic than it itself. Here, there are no longer facts or norms (even implicit ones) that I can appeal to in explaining my action, since, as Wittgenstein puts it, there is no longer the specific kind of doubt that such an explanation could answer.²⁶

The problem here is not, it is important to note, that there is anything wrong or suspect about Brandom’s claim that even the most “basic” or foundational human behaviors *can* be characterized in terms that are “normative” in Brandom’s sense.²⁷ At *PI* 289, for instance, Wittgenstein says with reference to an immediate, first-person expression of pain, that to “use a word without justification does not mean to use it without right.” That is, even at the point of bedrock, where no further justificatory explanation is possible or useful, we may still describe performances as legitimate or illegitimate, and even (in many cases) “correct” or “incorrect” according to some standard. This possibility of “normative” description at this level is not at issue between Wittgenstein (as I am reading him) and Brandom; what is at issue, however, is the possibility, essential to Brandom’s account, of making it the basis of a subsequent general explicitation of the “norms implicit in practice” all along. Of course we may sometimes describe our existing practice as having involved, all along, some set of distinctive commitments; such descriptions will be useful, in general, only where there is some specific reason for doubt about those commitments or their bearing on the particular case, and may, again, always themselves be accepted or rejected. But in emphasizing the standing possibility that such descriptions fail, that we find ourselves at bedrock, without any possibility of further appeal, Wittgenstein challenges the notion of rules that sees them as always already silently determining our uses of words, throughout a language as a whole.²⁸ If, as I have argued, in the “bedrock” situation, appeals to implicit

norms fare no better, then Wittgenstein's paradox is just as fatal for Brandom's inferentialism as it is for the mythological picture of rules that it aims to replace.

Again, this critical claim is not, it is important to note, based on some version of the argument that if it is possible, in *any* case, for me to fail to find my ground with another, it must be impossible to find ultimately workable grounds or standards for agreement in *every* case. Such an argument, though perhaps resembling Descartes' argument for perceptual skepticism on certain reconstructions of it, would be a bad one, trading on what might seem to be a peculiarly philosophical tendency to absolutize the imperfections of our abilities to know or our liabilities to respond. It is, indeed, no part of Wittgenstein's claim to suggest on philosophical grounds that our capability to understand one another, or to find grounds for understanding where they at first seem to be lacking, goes any less far (or farther) than it in fact does. The fact that it does go as far as it does, indeed, can be seen as a remarkable one, and all the more so, in view of how little we can say, in a general sense, to explain it. Wittgenstein's claim is, rather, that, whatever this fact may be taken to involve, the justificatory or explanatory appeal to it cannot be either discharged or shored up by an appeal to facts or norms more basic than it itself. Our appeals to the fact of agreement, in the actuality of everyday conversation as well as in philosophical explanation, can in the end only retrace themselves, ceaselessly gesturing at the fact which is presupposed to, but never wholly explained by, all of our reference to rules, norms, or practices, whether explicit or implicit: the omnipresent but scarcely comprehended fact of our sharing (what is called) "a language" at all.

Again, seeing the way in which Wittgenstein's rule-following paradox gives us reason to doubt the ultimate coherence of any general account of language-use as depending in primitive proprieties implicit in practice, need not prevent us from acknowledging the existence, in many actual cases, of just the process of reflective *explicitation* that Brandom describes so carefully. Doubtless, this process does go on, and indeed does play an essential role in a wide variety of human institutions and "linguistic" practices. The present point is just that it is ultimately incoherent to make it, as Brandom does, the basis of an explanation of the possibility of meaningful language itself. A good example of the actual process of explicating norms, indeed, is the juridical practice of the articulation and reflective determination that Brandom cites as a model, wherein laws and standards of justice are articulated by reflection on past precedent and what can be seen to have been implicit in their previous application to particular cases. And in many, probably most, of the vast range of cases in which something like the articulation or explicitation of binding standards of practice or judgment does go on within a particular practice, it will be possible for its participants to see the standards or rules thus articulated as grounded in (what they will now be able to see as) proprieties or standards of judgment and evaluation that

were (at least as they will now see it) implicit in their practice all along. But it is one thing to say (what is surely true) that such a distinction between what is implicit in practice and what is later to be seen as explicit in rules plays an important role in our pursuit and description of a wide variety of human practices; it is quite another to appeal to the implicit/explicit distinction, in the general way Brandom does, as providing the basis for a general explanation of the possibility of human communication, and the contentfulness of its concepts, overall. In so doing, as we have seen, Brandom misplaces the specific and uniquely perilous situation of appeals to standards, and hence of the possibility of (what we may or may not be able to recognize as) “explicitation,” in our claims and demands on one another.

The difference between Brandom and Wittgenstein on this point has important consequences for the broader question of the specific *force of reason*, the basis and nature of the claim of the “better” reason over our actual decisions and acts of judgment. For consider how implicit and explicit norms are pragmatically enforced, according to Brandom’s social pragmatist picture. As we saw, for Brandom the enforcement of norms, and hence the institution of normativity, always depends on the practice of imposing positive or negative sanctions for correct or incorrect behavior. The stake of reasoning, what underwrites the force of the obligations we undertake in committing ourselves to particular claims, is always dependent on the threat or promise of the sanctions imposed by our peers, including the determination of whether we are entitled to membership in the community at all. Where the underlying threat is not immediately present, the force I take it to have may depend, to be sure, on my recognition of it as applying to me, or (what is equivalent) my recognition of myself as subject to its force.²⁹ Thus, to evaluate a performance as according or failing to accord with some explicit standard is always, for Brandom, to assess its liability to be rewarded or punished; it is this liability to sanction that underlies the possibility of specific performances being assessed at all. The liability to sanctions and rewards is seen as already existing, even before it is explicitly articulated in formulable standards; it is by reference to it, according to Brandom, that appeals to such explicitly articulated standards have the force that they do.

But as Wittgenstein’s consideration of rule-following, by contrast, brings out clearly, the “articulation” of standards to criticize specific performances is itself the operation of a fundamental claim of force. It is so, most of all, inasmuch as such explicitation effectively constitutes a standard of criticism, and so introduces determinate possibilities of criticism and sanction, punishment and reward, that did not exist before. (For instance, the laws or standards that prohibit extorting money from a corporation, and thus make it punishable to do so, do not exist prior to the determinate forms of social life and institution that give them sense). Of course, it is an integral part of the force of this kind of explicitly formulated normative claim that it can present the standard it “formulates” as having already existed, operating

silently as a determinate but “implicit” component of the practice that we already accepted. Brandom’s picture, in seeing the articulation of norms as always dependent on such implicit proprieties of practice, consents uncritically to this claim, both in general and in the manifold specific cases where it plays a role in the determination of our perceptions of rightness and the pursuit of our projects.

If understood in the way I am recommending, though, Wittgenstein’s rule-following considerations, by contrast, yield grounds for demystifying the theoretician’s claim to retrospectively recognize “proprieties” held to have been “implicit” in practice all along. These grounds are thus also grounds for interrogating critically the claim of force or power that the demand for this kind of “recognition” involves. From this perspective, the fact that “we” (but who is included in this “we”?) can constitute standards of judgment and then apply them to new cases in a way that is (largely) recognizable as “uniform,” is, again, bound to appear remarkable; but as it is not founded in any determinate or describable fact of our agreement on beliefs or contents of judgment, it is not, also, founded in the commonality of threats we all fear or rewards we all seek. When a performance is recognized as deviant, an appeal to “what we all do” or to the rule or regularity implicit, in any case, in our practices can have the effect of bringing the performer back in line; it will have this effect, in particular, whenever the performer can recognize herself as having been committed, all along, to the standard we thereby articulate. But this recognition will be shown, if at all, only in the complexity of what she then goes on to do; and it may, again, always be refused.

The claim to articulate binding standards of rationality, regularities of practice, or rules of use conceived as having always already (if implicitly) guided possibilities of significant expression in the practice of a language, is in any case always grounded in a claim of mastery, a claim on the part of the critic to be able to oversee, and thus articulate, the relevant possibilities.³⁰ The basis of this claim, as it is operative in our actual discourse, is not, in general, any actual or even promised application of real sanctions or rewards, but the mystified and even imaginary picture of language that is also the core of the metaphysical picture of rules that Wittgenstein most directly criticizes.³¹

The picture figures deeply in ordinary as well as philosophical practices of criticism; its methodological basis is the ordinary ambition to gain insight into the abstract expressive possibilities of the structure of language as a whole, and to portray them at some level of abstraction from the variety of actual performances they are seen as determining. Brandom, as we have seen, shares this ambition with others who have theorized language as grounded in “social practices.” And although he takes pains to avoid an implausible regulism or any simple attribution of norms to the standards of “communal practice,” his picture nevertheless replicates the fundamental instability of the earlier, less sophisticated social-practice structuralisms

whose explanatory ambition it shares. These projects have in common that they take for granted both the accessibility of the basis of linguistic meaningfulness to theoretical description, and the utility of some coherent concept of linguistic “use” or “practice” in explaining it. But Wittgenstein’s rule-following paradox, in challenging the structuralist to account for the gap between rules and their application, poses a fundamental problem for this configuration of commitments. It does so, most of all, by exposing the open problem of the application of a word to a new case of its use. The paradox of rule-following shows that this problem will always be open, as long as we picture language itself as a structure intelligible to theoretical description. No matter how complete this description is, no matter how much it adduces in terms of the proclivities of our practices or the commitments said to be inherent in them, it will still leave the open gap between the structure of language and the life of its use. The attempt to cross this gap with “implicit” proprieties of practice is, from this perspective, as futile as the earlier one to cross it with explicit, symbolically formulated rules. In each case the standard that is designed to explain the use of the word fails to do so, since it itself can be used in various ways. With Wittgenstein’s posing of the paradox, the authority of the structuralist picture is undermined in that it is shown up as inadequate, and indeed futile, for its explanatory purpose. It is thereby exposed to immanent critique at the point of the claim of power that it, in the guise of neutral explanation, recurrently exerts.

II

From his first published works on Austin and Wittgenstein, Stanley Cavell’s writing is marked by his profound critical engagement with the methods of ordinary language philosophy.³² In the articles “Must we Mean What we Say?” and “Knowing and Acknowledging,” for instance, Cavell takes up the question of the relationship of these methods to the traditional problem of skepticism, a question that will occupy him as well throughout the complex argument of *The Claim of Reason*.³³ Here, Cavell develops the methods of reflection on ordinary language pioneered by Austin, Ryle, and Wittgenstein not in order to provide a direct or indirect refutation of skepticism, but rather to articulate the unique position from which this reflection can engage in a dialogue with skepticism. For Cavell, the special resources available to this reflection arise most directly from the form of its most typical question, the question of “what we should say when . . .” in a variety of different circumstances. The appeal of this question is not to factual or statistical knowledge about normal patterns of speech behavior, but rather, in each case, to what the speaker herself will say in a new case. In a remarkable way, according to Cavell, the procedures of ordinary language philosophy appeal to a kind of knowledge we ourselves possess simply in virtue of being speakers of a natural language, a kind of knowledge that essentially involves our capacity to project our reasons into new situations.

Like Brandom's own argument for the implicit/explicit distinction, Cavell's appreciation of the distinctive methods of the ordinary language philosopher rests heavily on an interpretation of the implications of Wittgenstein's "rule-following considerations." For both philosophers, it is also significant that the possession of a language, and hence of a social existence, depends upon the ability to project a familiar concept into a new context in ways that our peers will deem appropriate. But whereas Brandom's inferentialism understands both this ability and the ability to determine appropriateness as governed by describable norms, ordinarily implicit if not explicit in practice, Cavell's appeal to ordinary language philosophy figures our ability to project concepts *itself* as the object of the philosopher's appeal. In practicing ordinary language philosophy, the philosopher does not seek to describe the norms governing discourse, but directly engages the interlocutor's own ability to make judgments of correctness and incorrectness.

It is significant for this appeal that the projection of words into new contexts is, as Cavell puts it in *The Claim of Reason*, characterized by both "outer variance' and 'inner constancy'."³⁴ That is, the meaning of a word can (in some sense) be the same, regardless of the social, pragmatic, or semantic context in which we use it. But contexts are heterogeneous and diverse. Despite our intuitive sense that words have more or less stable meanings, the question of whether a word can appropriately be used in a new context is never completely determined, at least in advance of our determination of this:

We learn and teach words in certain contexts, and then we are expected, and expect others, to be able to project them into further contexts. Nothing insures that this projection will take place (in particular, not the grasping of universals or the grasping of books of rules), just as nothing insures that we will make, and understand, the same projection. That on the whole we do is a matter of our sharing routes of interest and feeling, modes of response, senses of humor and significance and of fulfillment, of what is outrageous, of what is similar to what else, what a rebuke, what forgiveness, of when an utterance is an assertion, when an appeal, when an explanation—all the whirl of organism Wittgenstein calls "forms of life."³⁵

According to Cavell, then, the ongoing projection of words into new contexts is neither arbitrary nor "determined" by rules or norms. Rather, on the level of the methodological practice of ordinary language philosophy, the question of the application of an old word in a new case is not any longer a question of degrees of determinacy or arbitrariness with respect to any standard, but involves an appeal that must be made prior to the grasping of any standard. Any advance delimitation of the range of contexts in which a word can appropriately be used would destroy some of its fertile and constitutive ambiguity, and hence some of its sense. But it is the task of ordinary language

philosophy, or of a practice of ordinary interlocution informed by it, to negotiate the determination of appropriateness again and again, in each case appealing to the interlocutor's own senses of propriety, significance, and relevance. As Cavell puts it, nothing ensures that the "right" projection will take place; recognizing that there is no standard or principle whose formulation must convince means recognizing that there is no substitute, in the practice of ordinary language philosophy, for the ever-renewed appeal to what Cavell calls the "projective imagination." The openness of this appeal, its ability to engage the imaginative work of language itself, would be lost if we took it, as Brandom does, that it always amounts to the appeal to what could then later be presented as norms implicit in practice. That this appeal must be renewed in every new case, and that its application in each case is, to some extent at least, an exercise of the imagination, serves to mark it off from any comprehensive attempt to theorize the norms of language and reason once and for all.

The specific way in which Wittgenstein, according to Cavell, resists an interpretation of linguistic practice as essentially rule-bound comes out more clearly if we consider the concrete practices of reasoning in which the giving of rules and justifications ordinarily takes place. These practices essentially involve, as well, the *determination* of whether rules have indeed been followed. For Brandom, as we saw, this determination amounted to the application of critical "score-keeping" practices whereby interlocutors evaluate one another; such evaluation was, according to Brandom, "essentially something that can be done correctly or incorrectly." But as Cavell points out, there is an important difference between the practice of following a rule itself and the practice of determining whether a rule has been correctly followed:

For Wittgenstein, "following a rule" is just as much a "practice" as "playing a game" is (*PI*, 199). Now what are its rules? In the sense in which "playing chess" has rules, "obeying a rule" has none (except, perhaps, in a special code or calculus which sets us some order of precedence in the application of various rules); and yet it can be done or not done. And whether or not it is done is not a matter of rules (or of opinion or feeling or wishes or intentions). It is a matter of what Wittgenstein, in the *Blue Book*, refers to as "conventions" (p. 24), and in the *Investigations* describes as "forms of life." (e.g., *PI*, 23). That is always the ultimate appeal for Wittgenstein—not rules.³⁶

In other words, though it may be the case that determining correctness or incorrectness is itself something that can be done correctly or incorrectly, it is significant that the practice of making this determination in each case is not itself, in general, something that is governed by determinate rules. In this sense, for Wittgenstein as Cavell interprets him, the practice of giving and asking for reasons is not one of "norms all the way down."³⁷ For the

determination of the correctness or incorrectness of a performance may indeed advert to a rule, implicit or explicit; but the determination, in a particular case, of how to understand what the rule itself requires cannot be made by introducing another rule, or indeed anything like a rule at all. Rather than seeing reasoning practices as embodying implicit rules, capable of subsequent explication in analysis, therefore, the ordinary language philosopher can only gesture toward what Wittgenstein calls “bedrock.” And when this bedrock is reached—when there are no more reasons to give—the ordinary language philosopher’s method does not seek to render it explicit or explicable, to summarize it in a set of principles or norms or a corpus of rules.³⁸ Rather, the ordinary language philosopher must simply appeal to it, mutely, insisting upon what we must share if we can share a world at all. At the same time, this appeal can itself always fail, breaking down into mutual incomprehension, exhibiting the claim of reason as something weaker, more limited and less assured in its operation, than any explicitation of norms and principles can express.³⁹

For Cavell, the normativity of concepts is not, then, constituted by the explicit, or even implicit, structure of norms presupposed in discourse; for even where such principles are presupposed, their application in any particular case is itself a matter that must be settled, in each case, by the exercise of the interlocutors’ own ability to project concepts into new contexts. That there is no substitute for this appeal, both in actual practices of reasoning and in the forms of philosophy that are best suited to demonstrate what is involved in them, is, according to Cavell, the most important implication of the ordinary language philosopher’s consideration of reasoning. In *The Claim of Reason*, Cavell further develops his account of the ordinary language philosopher’s appeal to this inexplicit and inexplicable ground of human attunement by considering Wittgenstein’s own distinctive way of using the concept of “criteria.” For Cavell, “criteria” are what competent speakers of a language share, what they agree in, if they share a language at all; but criteria can always fail us, and agreement in them is never to be assured by a standard conceived as determinate in advance. In this special sense, to recognize oneself in another on any particular occasion can be described as “agreeing” in criteria; but it is important that this agreement, shown in particular cases, is not reducible to agreement on any general set of explicit or implicit principles. And it is essential to our way of sharing criteria, of being mutually attuned, that we can also turn out not to share them, to fail to be attuned:

Our ability to communicate with him depends upon his “natural understanding”, his “natural reaction”, to our directions and our gestures. It depends upon our mutual attunement in judgments. It is astonishing how far this takes us in understanding one another, but it has its limits; and these are not merely, one may say, the limits of knowledge but the limits of experience. And when these limits are reached, when our

attunements are dissonant, I cannot get below them to firmer ground. The power I felt in my breath as my words flew to their effect now vanishes into thin air. For not only does he not receive me, because his natural reactions are not mine; but my own understanding is found to go no further than my own natural reactions bear it. I am thrown back upon myself; I as it were turn my palms outward, as if to exhibit the kind of creature I am, and declare my ground occupied, only mine, ceding yours.⁴⁰

There is in principle no way, according to Wittgenstein and Cavell, to foreclose this possibility of refusal, no ultimate authority to appeal to when the attempt to find oneself in the other fails. It follows that what is at stake in reasoning, in accepting or refusing an interlocutor's explicit justifications, or what is simply implicit in his ways of life, is never simply a matter of compliance or failure to comply with intelligible normative principles. Where disagreements arise, rules may be cited, and the introduction of explicit normative principles may suffice to convince one or another party to the dispute. The introduction of explicit rules is itself, for the ordinary language philosopher, an integral part of the variety of practices that we call reasoning, deliberating, arguing, and convincing. But the citation of an explicit principle, even if it is offered as normative for the kind of language-game that we are involved in, or as constitutive for rationality itself, may always itself fail to convince. And when this happens we are, as Cavell suggests, "thrown back upon ourselves" in a peculiar sense, left with nothing more to say, left to occupy our own ground silently, capable of appealing, in the end, only to ourselves.

This staking of ourselves in reasoning, figured in the ordinary language philosopher's methodological appeal to our own sense of the projection of our words and in her recognition of the ongoing possibility for appeals to rules to fail to convince, distinguishes the ordinary language philosopher's conception of these practices from other conceptions current within the analytic tradition. The standards or norms implicit in these ordinary practices may always be described in terms of rules, and the introduction of explicit rules will in fact in many cases help us to see what was involved in our practices all along, and thus show us the extent of our obligation to them. But if the introduction of explicit rules may *always* fail to convince, then there is an important sense in which this description by means of explicit forms of rules must *always* fail to portray its object. The theoretical adumbration of rules meant to describe the grammar of ordinary language practices can go only as far as the ordinary explicitation of rules within these practices itself goes; and there can be no hope that the introduction of any set of rules could suffice to eliminate all disagreements. What is made possible by the explicitation of any particular standard is then, at best, the appeal of one interlocutor to another ("see it this way!") *within* the practice of reasoning, an appeal that might always be taken up, or might be refused.

Such an appeal may be an appeal to an explicit or explicitable standard of judgment, but it may also be an appeal to *ways* of judging, routes of significance, ways of seeing what is significant in a new case or worthy of our attention in an old one. It may appeal as much to our powers of imagination as our capacities of judgment; what is at stake in it is as much how we shall think as what we shall do.

For the ordinary language philosopher, the peril of deviant reasoning is not so much sanctioning as alienation, the possibility that I may find myself (that any of us may find ourselves) at bedrock, unable to find words to justify myself to another, unable to find or articulate the ground of our mutuality. The threat of this alienation is not, at least in most cases, that I may actually be ostracized or forcefully excluded from the community; it is, rather, that I will not be able to find myself within it, will not be able to identify with its modes of action or its determinations of significance. And where I find these modes and determinations lacking, where I cannot find a grounding for their assumptions in myself, the place of the alienation they threaten can also be the opening of the possibility of their critique. Either way, what is staked is not so much our freedom from negative sanctions or even our membership in a community, but the very possibility of community itself, of the unthought ground of mutuality that enables me to receive the other, and to be received by her, at all. In taking up or failing to take up the other's words and reasons as words and reasons that can be ours as well, we will find or miss the ground of our mutuality, the extent to which we can share reasons, the extent to which we find ourselves capable or desirous of community with the other.⁴¹

The method of ordinary language philosophy, as Cavell reconstructs it, is thus practically unique in refusing to see the force of reason as dependent on the enforcement of norms, or indeed as amounting to any authority more distinct or elevated than that of the mere and never-ensured possibility of our relation to one another.⁴² It is for this reason that Cavell's appeal to the methods of ordinary language philosophy, in constant dialogue with the threat of skepticism, culminates in his recognition of the need to refigure the traditional problematic of skepticism as one of acknowledgment rather than knowledge. The skeptic figures the problem inherent in skepticism as a problem of inadequate knowledge, as if recognizing our human situation meant recognizing that there is something that we cannot know of the object before us or the person who speaks to us. The appeal to ordinary language does not, according to Cavell, block this conclusion directly, but rather interrogates its ground in the kind of projection of the ordinary uses of terms that it demands. This projection, evident in, for instance, the skeptic's question of whether we know of the existence of the whole of an object before us, whether we can really know (and not only assume, infer or guess) that our interlocutor is not simply an automaton, is, according to Cavell, neither fully "ordinary" nor completely "extraordinary." Instead of simply rejecting or ruling out the skeptic's appeal, Cavell interrogates the

movement of its desire, revealing it as coeval with the desire to develop a totalizing analysis that would speak to the human epistemological condition outside any particular context. But this desire to project our words “outside language-games,” to find a place to speak outside the practical contexts and concerns that alone give speech its ordinary surrounding, is not itself simply to be rejected, for it is inherent in the projective character of our language itself, in our tendency to project terms ever again into new and unanticipated contexts.⁴³ Through the ordinary language philosopher’s own appeal to the projective imagination, though, it becomes clear that what is at stake in it is not simply an inadequacy of knowledge. To work through my skepticism is to live it, to stake myself, in the concrete discursive recognition of another, on the possibility that there is a context of reasoning, desiring, and suffering that we can share.

The skeptic’s worry, which can masquerade as a theoretical one about the possible adequacy of knowledge, then stands revealed on the level of the real anxiety from which it arises, the anxiety of alienation or isolation, of failing to find myself with another, of being “thrown back upon myself” in solipsism. That this anxiety is always possible, for Cavell, means that traditional skepticism manifests (though darkly) something like a disappointment with the human condition as such, with the fate of having to seek recognition, finding and losing it ever again, outside the possibility of any conclusive refutation of our need for it.

III

Cavell’s use of the methods of ordinary language philosophy culminates by showing that we can see the stake of reasoning as the need for acknowledgment, of the way in which we live or fail to live the mutuality of our words. In this way, Cavell’s investigation of skepticism offers to orient its problematic away from a question of the completeness of knowledge, and toward the question of our ability to acknowledge one another. This breaks with the totalizing impulse of the structuralist understanding of language, offering instead to re-articulate the source of this impulse at the level of our need, or desire, for mutual understanding, agreement, or attunement, our need or desire to find a context of interests and reasons that we can share, a world in which we can live together. But to see how this alternative ethics arise from, and in turn requires, both an alternative conception of philosophical practice and a renewal of reflection about the nature of language itself, it is helpful to turn to the work of Levinas, a philosopher who is not in any sense a part of the analytic tradition, but whose work on language and ethics nevertheless may bear some significance for our understanding of how that tradition might, today, be received.

From his first philosophical work, Levinas’ thought is marked by the attempt to understand the foundations of our understanding of one another outside the closure of a totalizing system of metaphysics, phenomenology,

or ontology. These comprehensive approaches of these projects, Levinas argues, will always fail to adequately respect the ethical implications of our human relationships with one another by failing to acknowledge the respect in which *difference* or *alterity* figures in these relationships, a way that is, according to Levinas, more basic than any theoretical accounting for it. Recognition of the primacy of alterity, Levinas argues in *Totality and Infinity*, calls for an ethics that is at the same time “first philosophy.”⁴⁴ This ethics, according to Levinas, would recognize that the ethical claim of one upon another is in fact prior to those claims of ethical or metaphysical theory that would portray it as a form of relation between two already constituted terms. In this respect, for Levinas as for Cavell, the fundamental ethical imperative is the demand for acknowledgment, a demand whose satisfaction cannot be guaranteed by the systematic inscription of any set of norms, rules, or principles that could be known, but must be experienced in the experience of the possibility of my relationship to another. The question of my relationship to the other, for Levinas as for Cavell, is not first and foremost a question of knowledge (as much as it may seem to be within the traditional projects of philosophy), but rather a question of whether I can rise to the stringent exigency of an “ethical” demand, of a claim of the other upon me, that is never simply a dictate of comprehension.

For Levinas as for Cavell, the ethical demand of the other begins where I am tempted to say that my knowledge of her must be incomplete, where it is no longer possible to comprehend our relationship as that between two terms in a system of relations governed by theoretical principles or rules. If society as such is founded upon the regular or contractual relationship of autonomous subjects, fidelity to the ethical relationship itself demands an acknowledgment that comes before this contract. According to Levinas, it requires, instead, a recognition of the way in which the possibility of the relationship to the other, a relationship marked by “infinite” distance, itself marks the very form of our subjectivity. For according to Levinas, there is no responsibility outside the possibility of this genuinely constitutive relation to alterity, to the other as other, irreducibly singular and unique.

Levinas’ own ethics of alterity takes shape, most determinatively, against the backdrop of his critical rejection of Heidegger’s project of ontology, a project in which Levinas detects a repetition of the totalizing gesture of philosophy as such. This gesture, according to Levinas, aims to eliminate alterity and the ethical relationship by reducing it to the univocality of a monological description, in this case the description of the closure and totality of being. His rejection of Heidegger’s ontological project culminates in the dense and elliptical *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, where Levinas again insists upon a form of subjectivity that is defined by the possibility of my putting myself in the place of the other, outside any possibility of a theoretical comprehension of her situation.⁴⁵ It is only in this form of substitution, Levinas suggests, that the concreteness of the ethical relationship can appear in its full strangeness and difference, a concern that

unsettles the subject to its core, a concern for alterity that is in principle uncapturable as a concern for anything “in being” itself.

For Heidegger as Levinas reads him, the univocality of being meant that language as such must be the language of being, the speaking of being with one voice in the primordially of *logos*.⁴⁶ Rejecting this univocality, Levinas returns to language to find in it the possibility of ethics as an *otherwise than being*, a form of relationality and difference that cannot be reduced to the totalization of a single voice. Levinas’ consideration of this primordially yields one of the most suggestive distinctions of *Otherwise than Being*: the distinction between the *saying* (as the original form of the ethical appeal of one to another) and the *said* (of propositions, demonstration, and knowledge) in which it will always already be fixed:

From the amphibology of being and entities in the said we must go back to the saying which signifies prior to essence, prior to identification, on the hither side of the amphibology. Saying states and thematizes the said, but signifies it to the other, a neighbor, with a signification that has to be distinguished from that borne by words in the said. This signification to the other occurs in proximity. Proximity is quite distinct from every other relationship, and has to be conceived as responsibility for the other; it might be called humanity, or subjectivity, or self. Beings and entities weigh heavily by virtue of the saying that gives them light.⁴⁷

According to Levinas, the possibility of ethics—indeed, the possibility of subjectivity itself—depends on the possibility of a return to this paradoxical saying before the said, to a linguistic relation that is grounded in an exposure to the other. He treats this exposure as a kind of “signification” that is prior to the fixture of what is said in the form of propositions or contents; it is “prior to all objectification” and to any giving or exchanging of signs.⁴⁸ For Levinas, the possibility of any social relation, any intersubjective agreement of principles or judgments, any “game” of reasoning together in debate, discussion, argument, or conversation, depends on this more primordial saying. The appeal of the one to the other, for Levinas, is the voicing of a demand that cannot be captured in the objectivity of a set of rational contents, of a totality of propositions bearing rational relations to one another.

Were the critical and reflective methods of ordinary language philosophy, descendents of the envisioning of language that first began the analytic tradition as such, to take up this Levinasian discourse of the saying and the said, the distinction would necessarily be subject to far-ranging and difficult critical questions whose scope can only, at best, be indicated here.⁴⁹ To talk of the primacy of the saying over the said, of its greater “originality” and of the more basic and “grave” responsibility that stems from it, is at best to gesture toward the same ineffable ground that Wittgenstein calls bedrock,

the ground of mutuality that itself, in the ambit of any general theoretical attempt to elucidate it, stands revealed as groundless. As we have seen, both the critical upshot of Wittgenstein's rule-following considerations and the practice of ordinary language philosophy depend on the possibility of a methodological acknowledgment of this groundlessness, of the ultimate baselessness of the fact of our agreement. But the methodological acknowledgment of this groundlessness within a practice of philosophical reflection or linguistic criticism demands as well our recognition that, at this point of bedrock, "my spade is turned," that the movement of articulation here fails in the very saying.

The most significant legacy of these alternative considerations of linguistic reason and reasoning, then, is not an alternative account or even a single alternative practice. It is, rather, the opening of a set of *questions* about the nature of language and its relationship to what we treat as the ordinary forms of social life. Within the ambit of these questions, it must be asked whether it is even so much as possible to grasp the "structure of language" as the basis for an explanatory account of these ordinary forms, or of the role of what was once grasped as reason in determining and controlling them. The effect of posing such questions can be, as well, to reopen the question of the basis of rational force, of the ground for what we take to be the claims of reason in application to the pursuit of our lives. To ask them is also to interrogate more closely the relationship between claims for the force of reason and the real systems of power and violence with which they have sometimes made common cause; it is to reopen the ancient question of the relationship of the force of language to that which binds a community together, ensures its regular life, or seeks to conserve or protect its integrity against internal or external enemies. These questions, as we have seen, are recurrently being reopened by the historical trajectory of structuralism, even as it tries incessantly to foreclose them; that they bear a deep significance for any future thinking of the political, of ethics, and of the claims of rational reflection in today's world, seems beyond doubt. Their opening, in the text of analytic philosophy's sustained consideration of intersubjective meaning and interpretation, ought to reveal as well the way in which the tradition's sustained inquiry into language deepens and radicalizes them.

Part IV

Conclusion

9 The question of language

Now I am tempted to say, that the right expression in language for the miracle of the existence of the world, though it is not any proposition *in* language, is the existence of language itself.

Wittgenstein¹

If there is such a thing as language, the historical singularity of the analytic tradition lies in its ambition to lay it open to view, and so to render its underlying principles, the form and order of its terms, and the basis of its possibilities of meaning open to philosophical criticism. The unprecedented envisioning of language that the analytic tradition undertook from its first stages would, if successful, have delivered the human “capacity” for linguistic meaning to philosophical thought as an explicit object of description. In so doing, it would have revealed language as the previously unthought ground of the expressive possibilities of a human life, the source of its deepest possibilities of clarity and the root of its most threatening illusions. Yet as we have seen, the critical discourse that originally sought to produce a clarified life by policing the bounds of sense could not foreclose a more problematic encounter with the pervasive question of the basis of its own authority. Thus, with a necessity that is the same as that of reason’s own reflection on its inherent forms, the analytic tradition’s modalities of linguistic analysis and interpretation became more and more involved in the underlying problems of our everyday access to language itself.

Over the course of this work, I have sought to document some of these problems as they have arisen, and exerted their effects, upon the texts and questions of twentieth-century philosophy. They are apparent, most of all, in relation to the structuralist picture of language whose detailed pursuit evinced them as theoretical results in the projects of philosophers like Quine and Wittgenstein. But since, as I have also attempted to show, this picture is already implicit in the first self-reflective words of ordinary language, the problems that these projects demonstrate are by no means limited to the philosophically special project of “explaining” or “accounting for” our understanding of language. If language is never simply given to the theoretical reflection that would reveal its overall structure, and if the theoretical pro-

jects that have pursued it have ended by eliciting the inadequacy of their own explanatory modes, then our everyday access to language becomes all the more mysterious. The specific critical results of the tradition's envisioning of language are then visible as linguistic epiphanies of the extraordinariness of the ordinary, the strangeness of what is most familiar, the puzzling and uncanny possibility of our everyday access to language, and of the ordinary language that ceaselessly inscribes this access, from its first word, in the circumstances and practices of our lives.²

For the philosophical discourse that counted a turn to the analysis of language as the essence of its revolutionary break with the philosophical past, the question of the bearing of language on a human life could never count simply as one problem among others.³ The progress of the tradition, in particular with its determinative discovery of the problems of the relationship of "meaning" to "use" or "practice" and the projects and results that evinced the ineliminable interdependence of the "syntax" and "semantics" of meaning with the "pragmatics" of the actions and goals of human practice, moved to liberate this problem from the obscurity in which it was initially cloaked. At the same time, the explanatory assumptions of those theories that formulated one or another theory of "meaning" in terms of "use" or "practices" tended to obscure the problem once again, dissimulating it at the point of its fundamental threat to the intelligibility of a human life. Thus the problem of the existence of language, although visible within a larger history as the basis of analytic philosophy's own most significant critical innovations, has repeatedly been disavowed or forgotten within the tradition whose own methods and modes it continues to structure. The disavowal is itself, as we shall see in this final chapter, rooted in a recurrent tendency of the tradition to hide its own most central problems. Reversing it could bring about the substantial methodological renewal of a tradition whose dispersal and exhaustion have often, of late, been bemoaned.⁴

If the problems of our access to language indeed inflect the most ordinary acts and circumstances of our lives, then the analytic inquiry can also be seen as the tradition's critical encounter with their most pervasive contemporary ideological determinants. For the claim to comprehend language is itself, in part, a claim of power; the analytic tradition's reflection on this claim provides internal resources for resisting it, at the point of the everyday metaphysics of meaning that it presupposes. The structuralist picture of language itself figures determinately in some of the most deeply seated assumptions and strategies of power in the modes of life definitive of advanced industrial societies of the twentieth century. The critical results that articulate its failures are therefore intelligible, as I have argued, as chapters of a liberatory project of demystification, the checking of claims of power by the diagnosis and criticism of the false and misleading pictures of human life that form their basis. Here, reflection leads to freedom: the demystification of structuralism's false pretense to master language's own inherent possibilities offers to deliver a clarified human life from the claims of power it facilitates.

But if the claims of linguistic reason that threaten to exert violence over life are, as I have argued, rooted in the very forms that would make (that do make) language intelligible to us at all, the critical work of “demystification” becomes more complex and harder to place. For this work can no longer ascribe the violence of identity and totality simply to the consequences of an optional picture of language or its claim on a human life. Since there is no other picture, they are revealed as instances of a more fundamental violence, one that arises with, and is already fully present in, the first word of language’s reflection on itself. In tracing the pictures that mystify the heterogeneous moments of our lives by assimilating them to the identical and totalizable, the critical inquiry that aims to check the violence of language can, similarly, no longer count these pictures simply as errors or illusions. For the claims of identity and totality that structuralism more explicitly formulates are revealed as inherent to the irreducible phantasmatic core of ordinary language itself, and invoked in its every word. In this way, at the point of its encounter with the basic question of the relationship of life to language, the analytic project of demystification yields to a more fundamental mystery (one that is, yet, not a mystification) at the center of our ordinary access to words and the fatedness of our lives to what they can say. The mystery is that of (as we may put it) the existence of language itself, the fact of its constant accessibility to the individual moments and circumstances of an ordinary life. It can be the occasion for wonder, or for a transformed sense of the immanence of a life given over, in every word of language, to the openness of its possible discovery of itself.

I

In the contemporary texts that are today most representative of analytic philosophy, the question of language has neither the methodological nor the thematic centrality it had in the original and founding moments of the tradition. Once grasped as the basis for a revolutionary philosophical program of linguistic clarification, the question of the nature of language and its relationship to a human life has largely retreated from the explicit concerns of many analytic philosophers, even those who most centrally continue the methods originally suggested by this program. The forms of this retreat are various, but they share (as I shall argue here) a common, if normally obscure, root in the critical tendencies of the program of clarification itself. Documenting this root can help to remove the obscurity and reopen the question of language for the methods of analytic philosophy, or those that inherit them in a broader and more inclusive space of philosophical discussion.

In the recent analytic literature, dissimulation or obscuration of the original question of language takes several typical forms. One of the most common of these is evident in many of the projects of contemporary philosophical *naturalism*. Within these projects, if language is positively described at all, it often appears only as an empirically explicable phenomenon of

biology or sociology, one whose own structure bears no specific relevance to the problems of philosophy or their resolution. In this literature in particular, the project of “explaining” language or linguistic representation is then treated as the project of explaining a range of facts of behavior, biology, neuroscience, cognitive science, or some combination thereof.⁵ The naturalistic projects that take up the project in this way, and so construe the totality of language as comprised by such facts, are themselves heirs to the critical results of analytic philosophy that demonstrated the inherent difficulties of accounting for linguistic meaning by means of a description of the basis of its possibility. Their restriction of material for the explanation of language to the facts of nature is legitimate, insofar as there is certainly no other range of facts available for this explanatory project. But the totalizing assumption that all of what we pre-theoretically discuss under the heading of “meaning” must be either completely and adequately explained in this way, or unreal, is not demanded or even supported by any actual empirical result or collection thereof.⁶

An often-cited basis for this assumption is Quine’s rejection of the analytic/synthetic distinction and the purported consequence, drawn indeed by Quine himself, that facts about linguistic meaning (if they exist at all) are, in a sufficiently broad sense, “empirical” facts amenable to explanation within a “naturalized” epistemology. But as we have seen, the critical result of Quine’s own inquiry into possibilities of translation is not simply that the facts of language are comprehensible as causally determined within a total theory of language use, but that even such a theory will leave what we intuitively or pre-theoretically grasp as identities and differences of “meaning” systematically indeterminate. The alternatives, then, are two: either to deny the utility of ordinary discussion of “meanings,” as Quine himself sometimes suggests we do, and take up the purely empirical description of the causal regularities and preconditions of language use; or to renew the critical reflection that the analytic tradition has long undertaken on the elusive role of meaning in our lives. If this second alternative is taken, the question of the adequacy of naturalist accounts can be brought into a more sophisticated dialogue with the forms of theoretical desire that actually motivate them. The naturalistic restriction of material for explanation to structures of causally interrelated facts invokes a research program that would indeed, if complete, produce a kind of understanding of the “facts” or “phenomena” of language, but it does not succeed in quieting the desire for intelligibility that would still persist in posing its question of the significance of language even if all the facts were in.

Another often-cited basis for the widespread assumption that a critical inquiry into language is unnecessary or irrelevant to the contemporary practice of analytic philosophy is the claim that the utility of such an inquiry has been refuted or disputed by positive theoretical results of the tradition itself. In particular, in 1972, Kripke’s *Naming and Necessity* demonstrated the existence of “metaphysically necessary” identities and judgments

that are at the same time *a posteriori*.⁷ For instance, the identity “Water is H₂O” is metaphysically necessary since water could not be, in any metaphysically possible world, anything other than H₂O, although it is also *a posteriori*.⁸ The result, together with Kripke’s apparatus of “rigid designation,” was widely taken to support the possibility of an analysis of modality in terms of the metaphysical notion of possible worlds rather than the epistemic notion of *a prioricity*. In a related fashion, the “causal” theories of reference suggested by Kripke and Putnam were taken to establish an alternative to Russell’s analysis of names as concealed descriptions. For “causal” theorists, they are, instead, directly linked to their objects by means of an initial act of ostension, demonstration, or baptism.

Both developments were seen by some philosophers as demonstrating the limitations of a purely “conceptual” analysis of the significance of any name or referring term in language. Such analyses, it became common in the 1980s and 1990s to urge, must be supplemented with at least partially causal or empirical descriptions of the phenomenon of reference. Additionally, the development of model theory and its “possible world semantics” was seen by some as suggesting the possibility of a methodological return to “metaphysics” in some non-pejorative sense.⁹ This metaphysics would be the analysis of the metaphysical structure of possible worlds without especial regard to the semantic or linguistic possibilities of our description of them. More broadly, all three developments have been seen by various philosophers and interpreters as showing the limitations of “linguistic analysis,” at least as it was practiced by the first generation of analytic philosophers, or even as ushering analytic philosophy itself into a second phase whose methods can no longer be characterized as grounded centrally in the analysis of language.¹⁰

Within a comprehensive history of the methods and results of the analytic tradition, these developments of modal logic, model theory, and the “theory of reference” ought certainly to be accorded a prominent place. They have called into question previously undoubted conclusions and suggested new ways of thinking about the epistemology and metaphysics of logic itself. But whatever their importance, the interpretation that takes them to have established the irrelevance of the “linguistic turn” to the continuing methods of the analytic tradition is ungrounded in these results themselves or any of their actual implications. It may certainly be legitimate, in light of the results of Kripke, Putnam, and others, to hold that earlier descriptive theories of nominal reference must be supplemented with partially causal accounts of reference, or that it is possible to draw a logically motivated distinction between metaphysical and epistemic necessity that was often missed by earlier analysts. None of this, however, goes even part of the way to establishing the impossibility of linguistic analysis or reflection or its irrelevance to the continuing methods of analytic philosophy. Insofar as all of these results, indeed, have their basis in extended applications of modal logic and model theory, they follow most directly from the very same project of “conceptual” reflection on the structure of language and logic that analytic philosophers have practiced

since the beginning of the tradition. The relatively more formal and symbolic areas of this reflection can be distinguished from those relatively less so, but no result of mid-century logic or inquiry into its epistemology or metaphysics can by itself establish the irrelevancy of the project, or the impossibility of reopening the question of language in which it is rooted.

Even where language is still discussed, and the hope of a positive description of its structure and nature still pursued, the underlying and basic critical question of the relationship of language to life is again often routinely dismissed or obscured. The normal form of this obscuration, in the contemporary texts of analytic philosophy that do still take up explicitly the question of language, is the prejudicial assumption that language must, if it is intelligible at all, be intelligible as consisting in, or based in, some form of everyday social practices. As we have seen, the assumption appears often enough, and with little enough independent argument, in the texts and projects of contemporary analytic philosophy, to confirm its status as something like a dogma. And as we have also seen, it is grounded in a recurrent misreading of the significance of the analytic tradition's determinative posing of the question of the relationship of language to its everyday use or practice. This posing, in the texts of Quine and Sellars as much as the later Wittgenstein, articulates the fundamentally open question of language's application by exposing the underlying failures of its structuralist description. The recurrent misreading, by contrast, closes this question by assuming the explicability of use in terms of one or another set of practices. But in the sense in which we can say that such things as playing cards, issuing legal judgments, or holding elections are "practices," using language is not itself a "practice." For in the sense in which we can say, of any of these garden-variety "practices," what their ordinary point is, what the significance of their undertaking, what the qualifications necessary, what regions of life they are likely to arise in, what are likely to be the characteristic forms of their successes and failures, frustrations and illusions, *we cannot* say this, in any general way, about language.¹¹ Whereas, we might say, we can normally (or at least, often) count on an understanding of the point of practices within our lives, language has no such point within our lives because its forms are coextensive with these lives. And the various sub-regions of activity into which we might divide the speaking of language (arguing, debating, asserting claims, chatting, giving orders, making pleas, demanding excuses; or asserting claims, evaluating them, drawing inferences from them; or "saying things" vs. "doing things" with words; or mumbling, screaming, singing songs, speaking loudly or softly, emphatically or deferentially?—the classifications cross-cut one another)¹² are too richly intertwined and too mutually inseparable in the most ordinary experiences of language to provide any help to the theoretical imagination that would grasp their structure overall.

Grasping the difficulties that arise in the course of attempts to describe theoretically the rules of the practices that are supposed to underlie language, some have attempted to save the picture by portraying the learning

of a language as a species of irreducibly practical competence or “knowing-how,” analogous to learning a skill or technique, rather than a “knowing-that” that would be describable in terms of clearly stated rules. The distinction, which goes back to Ryle’s (1949) discussion of the dispositional “know-how” involved in the ability to make various kinds of assertions and reports, actually provides no help. For again, in the sense in which various performances of everyday life can be said to involve knowing how to do various things (riding a bicycle, speaking a second language, pole-vaulting and the like), learning a first language cannot be said to involve learning how to do anything (unless it be learning how to do anything, that is, how to do anything at all).¹³

How, then, can we think about the “point” of our “linguistic” practices, regular experiences or phenomena of language that are also the constitutive moments of our lives? It is true that in a great many of these experiences, “meaning” or “significance” is regularly (that is, can regularly be) at issue. That is, the question “what does that mean?” (or “what do *you* mean?”) can arise (although this does not mean that there is any case in which it has to arise, or that it has to ask after the same thing in each case when it does arise), and where it does arise, it can be the occasion for conversation or reflection, negotiation of interests or demands, the imposition of power or submission to its claims. But to treat all of these varied and diverse experiences of language as if there were some single description that covered them all (for example, “communication”), or some particular set of purposes that they all served, would be to falsify their everyday reality and artificially foreclose the movement of the desires that animate them.¹⁴

The question “what do you mean?” posed in the course of a mutually undertaken project, the negotiation of a possible future, is not just a request for theoretical explication; it can also aim, or purport to aim, for consensus or mutual understanding. It can also challenge assumptions, interrogate the bases of claims or the implications of pseudo-claims, and seek to expose those linguistic effects of authority that depend on the presumption of meaningfulness where there is actually none. In all of these cases where the question of meaning can arise, the analogy of language to a practice inscribes an answer, or the form of an answer, in advance. And so its imposition amounts to denying the significance of this question. Where the question of meaning would inquire into the significance of our practices themselves, where it would ask after their implications for our other or larger goals, the possibilities they open or close, their role in a human life, the misconceived analogy of language to a practice blocks these inquiries before they can even get started.

II

The analytic tradition has systematically and pervasively interrogated what is involved in our ordinary access to meaningful language, asking, in some

of its most foundational gestures, what makes it so much as possible for spoken or written signs to have meaning at all. It has just as often, and in the same ambiguous modes of criticism, foreclosed this question as an instance of a kind of theorizing that it has taken, more or less clearly, to be impossible owing to the central and decisive ambiguities of the enterprise of envisioning language itself. We can see the methodological roots of this tendency to foreclosure in a 1940 paper by Austin in which he proposes to take up the vexed question of the sense of the phrase “the meaning of a word.” He concludes that the phrase is, in many, if not all, of its uses, “a dangerous nonsense-phrase” that ought, on the whole, to be avoided.¹⁵ The confusions to which it regularly leads, particularly in philosophy, arise in particular from the specific kind of error of generalization to which it tempts us:

Having asked in this way, and answered, “What is the meaning (of the word) ‘rat’?” “What is the meaning of (the word) ‘cat’?”, “What is the meaning of (the word) ‘mat’?” and so on, we then try, being philosophers, to ask the further *general* question, “What is the meaning of a word?” But there is something spurious about this question. We do not intend to mean by it a certain question which would be perfectly all right, namely, “What is the meaning of (the word) ‘word?’”: *that* would be no more general than is asking the meaning of the word “rat”, and would be answered in a precisely similar way. No: we want to ask rather, “What is the meaning of a-word-in-general?” or “of any word”—not meaning “any” word you like to choose, but rather no particular word at all, just “any word”. Now if we pause even for a moment to reflect, this is a perfectly absurd question to be trying to ask . . . This supposed general question is really just a spurious question of a type which commonly arises in philosophy. We may call it the fallacy of asking about “nothing-in-particular” which is a practice decried by the plain man, but by the philosopher called “generalizing” and regarded with some complacency. Many other examples of the fallacy can be found: take, for example, the case of “reality”—we try to pass from such questions as “How would you distinguish a real rat from an imaginary rat?” to “What is a real thing?”, a question which merely gives rise to nonsense.¹⁶

Having once committed this error of asking the question of the meaning of any word in general (Austin writes it “What-is-the-meaning-of a word?”), Austin says, we may all too easily pass to another question or pseudo-question, namely “What is the-meaning-of-a-word?” that seems to ask what “meaning” itself is. And in response to this question, Austin says, we now are forcibly tempted to introduce various entities that might seem to provide reassurance, but are in fact fictitious, entities such as “ideas,” “concepts” and “sense-data” that have been the characteristic stock-in-trade of philosophy, whenever questions of meaning and generalization arise.

The error responsible for the pseudo-question about the meaning of a word, and for all the mischief it causes, is thus, according to Austin, both typical of philosophy and avoidable through reflection on the grammatical forms and structures of ordinary language, as they are ordinarily employed. The process of spurious generalization from which it arises is one that may be suggested or intimated by certain forms of our everyday language (in particular, the phrase “the meaning of . . . ”) but it would not be tolerated, even for a moment, by the “plain man” whose image Austin contraposes to that of the philosopher. Nevertheless, according to Austin, we may easily, especially when doing philosophy, be tempted to it by implicit or explicit theories of language that seem to permit it, for instance the “curious belief that all words are *names*” or a more general tendency to take “the meaning of (the word) ‘x’ to be, in *each* case, a referring phrase.”¹⁷

In thus considering and criticizing philosophical uses of the phrase “the meaning of a word” and the fallacies of generalization to which they can tempt us, Austin displays in a particularly clear form some of the most characteristic diagnostic and critical tendencies of the analytic tradition. Applying the various methods of what would later be called “ordinary language philosophy,” he undertakes to judge the meaningfulness of one of the typical questions of philosophy by considering the typical or ordinary uses of its main phrase. He concludes that the phrase is legitimate in some of its employments, but “dangerously” misused in those philosophical employments that depend on the error of the projective imagination that he diagnoses. And although he acknowledges that “one should not impute motives,”¹⁸ he does not hesitate to give a diagnostic account of the characteristic temptations that lead us to this error. These temptations, Austin suggests, arise from our too easily moving between forms of language that appear similar but are “actually” very different in context, our assuming that a question that has sense in particular cases must therefore have sense in all cases or in the “general” case, and then inventing all sorts of fictions to answer it.

The conclusion that Austin reaches about “meaning” has also often been repeated in the history of analytic philosophy. Indeed, virtually every project that has critically considered the term or concept “meaning” has reached a similar conclusion.¹⁹ It is that there really are no such “things” as meanings, that the tendency to treat meanings as objects over against the words whose meanings they are, or to assume that every term must be like a proper name in referring to some particular object, is grounded in a characteristic error of the imagination and ought to be rejected. The conclusion is recognizable as an instance of the analytic tradition’s more general inclination to criticize what it sometimes describes as the *objectification* of meaning, to criticize the tendency to treat the meanings of words as if they were themselves objects correlative to the words that stand for them.²⁰ But the success of the criticism tends to eliminate the trenchancy of its terms of critique. If it is indeed not only false, but impossible to answer the general question “What is the

meaning of a word?" with the specification of an object or a type of object, then it will indeed have been impossible to have committed the error that the critique claims to identify. The error will not have been in giving the question a false answer, but in thinking one could give a (referring) answer at all. The error of attempting to do what is impossible (at least by the lights of the critique that determines the positive and negative conditions of the possibility of our speaking about language at all) will be intelligible only as the false analogy of an imagination that, assimilating linguistic forms to one another, sees here the illusion of a question where there is none, and so the possibility of an answer that, in the end, is no answer at all.

Austin's critique must therefore rule out the general question "What is the meaning of a word?" along with all of the objectual answers that have been offered for it. Having predetermined the impossibility of answering the question, he must exclude even the possibility of posing it. But the very terms of criticism by means of which Austin excludes the question are grounded in responses to this question itself. For, as we have seen repeatedly over the last several chapters of this work, it was the question of the possibility and ground of linguistic meaning that made possible, to begin with, the very modes of linguistic criticism that Austin here employs. In consigning the phrase "the meaning of a word" at least in its philosophical uses, to the category of "dangerous nonsense," Austin employs both reflection on ordinary linguistic usage and diagnosis of the errors to which a failure to comprehend this usage may lead us. Yet in thus rendering judgment on the possibility of significant employments of the phrase, Austin practices the critique of language in an unreflectively juridical mode that the tradition's better reflective judgment would learn to overcome. His appeal to the judgment of the "plain man"—certainly itself a "philosophical" straw-man whose appearance (one thinks of Berkeley's appeal to the opinions of the "ordinary man" in his defenses of idealism) has long been responsible for any amount of mischief—itself constructs the illusion of a determinate standard of sense that can hardly be discharged by any analysis of the grammatical or logical forms of ordinary language yet accomplished. The employment of such a standard—in which the philosopher purports to pass judgment on what is permissible, and what impermissible, in an ordinary language untainted by the philosophical imagination—was always recognizably problematic, and grew more so as Oxford philosophers presented successive analyses, always incomplete, of the forms of this ordinary language.

Exhibiting an ambiguous but essential tendency of analytic philosophy, Austin's analysis thus moves to close the very question whose openness is the basis of the possibility of its own critical terms. His attempt to exclude the question of linguistic meaning by introducing a standard of meaningfulness grounded in what is supposed to be the linguistic grammar of an ordinary life presupposes, as an essential methodological precondition, the openness of the very question he wishes to close. This ambiguity is, as we have seen, rooted in the deep critical ambiguity involved in the analytic

tradition's envisioning of language itself, whereby the description of the positive structure of language tends essentially and repeatedly to undermine the basis of its own possibility. It is also the root of all of the various critical gestures by means of which the analytic tradition, especially in its most recent instances, having opened the question of language in a vague and indeterminate way, repeatedly again moves to close the question by undermining, dissimulating, or obscuring it.

Further reflection on the roots of this ambiguity tends to demonstrate, moreover, how deeply, and inextricably, the language of the everyday is indeed bound up with the "dangerous" forms of philosophical imagination of which ordinary language philosophy, in some of its forms, would like to purge it. The distinction between "ordinary" and philosophically "extraordinary" employments of language, which philosophers like Austin and Ryle (but not Wittgenstein) would have liked to draw, develop, enforce and police through their description of the forms of ordinary language, is perspicuous, within this further reflection, as another instance of the attempt to fix the bounds of sense by means of predetermined criteria. Precluding the question of meaning by means of a standard of sense that is nowhere actually specified or defended, it forecloses the desire that leads us to pose the question of meaning in "ordinary" as well as "philosophical" life, thereby missing the opportunity for a deeper reflection on its forms and implications here as well.

In this way, the tendency to disavow or reject the problems of linguistic meaning that has become widespread in recent analytic philosophy has its roots, ironically, in the critical impulses that originally underwrote the most central projects of the analytic tradition itself. Following Quine's indeterminacy result and developing further its implications for what might be involved in an understanding of language in relation to social and intersubjective praxis, Donald Davidson developed, over the course of the 1960s and 1970s, a series of analyses of those possibilities of linguistic interpretation in which, he followed Quine in assuming, all theoretical descriptions of meaning must be grounded. For Davidson, all comprehension of linguistic meaning was grounded in what he called radical interpretation, a generalization of Quine's radical translation.²¹ Within the course of the attempt to understand another, according to Davidson, speakers and interlocutors exhibit a practical competence which could be described by means of an empirical theory of a certain form, a so-called "theory of interpretation" or "meaning" for a natural language. Such a theory, Davidson supposed, would exhibit certain formal constraints, relating truth and meaning in the language as a whole by means of recursively applicable axioms.²² But because, on any real occasion of interpretation, determinations of the truth of utterances and of their meanings are deeply and inseparably intertwined, and because of the indeterminacies that Quine had adduced, the actual application of a theory of interpretation will always depend on certain auxiliary assumptions, so called "charity assumptions" that, without any direct basis

in empirical fact, assume the conformity of the alien community's large-scale beliefs and general understanding of the world with one's own.²³

The conclusion led Davidson to repudiate "the very idea of a conceptual scheme" and the metaphysical picture of the relationship of such a scheme, or a language, to the world that it presupposes.²⁴ Because charity assumptions are, according to Davidson, necessary presuppositions for any understanding of the meaning of an alien language to be possible at all, it makes no sense, in the actual practice of interpretation, to suppose that they might not hold. From this, Davidson draws an anti-relativist conclusion: that since it makes little sense to suppose that conceptual schemes could differ in large-scale respects in their relation to a commonly shared world, we must reject the whole notion of such schemes, as set over against a world of objects, experiences, or events that they capture or "organize" at all. Accordingly, Davidson argued, it makes little or no sense to suppose, in the actual course of interpretation, that an alien culture's large-scale understanding of the world is different from our own. The indeterminacies already adduced by Quine, together with the necessity of charity assumptions in translation, thus demand that we reject the idea of a conceptual scheme, along with the metaphorical picture of the possible variety of schematizations of the world that it supports.

In 1986, Davidson drew what might well be seen as the larger implication of this line of thought for analytic philosophy's project of comprehending language:

I conclude that there is no such thing as a language, not if a language is anything like what many philosophers and linguists have supposed. There is therefore no such thing to be learned, mastered, or born with. We must give up the idea of a clearly defined shared structure which language-users acquire and then apply to cases. And we should try again to say how convention in any important sense is involved in languages; or, as I think, we should give up the attempt to illuminate how we communicate by appeal to conventions.²⁵

Following out Quine's result, Davidson thus ultimately rejects the structuralist picture of language along with the notion of determinate conventions that has often supported it. His counsel is one of defeat: the attempt to understand language as a structure that can be acquired or learned, shared by a community and clearly defined by analytical interpretation of its practices, has failed and with the failure, we must reject the very idea of a language that is presupposed by it. Thus developing the consistent aporetic results of the analytic tradition's attempt to envision language as a structure, Davidson concludes that the attempt should be abandoned, or at least seriously rethought.

Set within a broader critical reflection, his result might have occasioned, instead of or in addition to this counsel of defeat, a wider consideration of

the possibilities and limits of the human capacity to discuss linguistic meaning. The aporetic results of the analytic tradition do indeed bear witness to the repeated failure of this capacity in its explicitly developed structuralist mode. The results of this attempt give reason to believe that this capacity undermines itself, in a surprising and revealing way, as soon as language itself is named, envisioned, conceived or described. Davidson, following out this envisioning in the specific context of structuralism, and recording its aporetic consequences there, does not ask whether, and to what extent, the problem that he evinces exists already, and inscribes its implications, in the everyday life of language itself. Imagining that he can avoid structuralism simply on the level of theory, he fails to ask about its continued inscription in the very forms of discourse that we employ to consider and criticize the meanings of terms every day. Had he done so, his consideration of the ground of linguistic meaning in the interpretive practices of everyday life might have, beyond simply counseling defeat, shown more thoroughly the lived implications of our problematic use of language, or of its constant critical reflection on itself.²⁶

III

In a far ranging and much discussed recent work, John McDowell aims to resolve a dilemma that characterizes recent analytic inquiry into the relationship of experience to thought. Faced with the question of this relationship, McDowell claims, analytic philosophers are prone to oscillate between an untenable empiricist appeal to the “givenness” of empirical content, on the one hand, and (on the other) a “coherentism” that tends to present thought as entirely unconstrained by anything external to it.²⁷ Help in resolving the dilemma, McDowell argues, is to be found in a conception of experience as drawing on the same conceptual capacities that are responsible for the spontaneity of thought.²⁸ By realizing that the capacities drawn on in thought and experience are largely the same, McDowell argues, we can picture the objects upon which our experience bears as genuinely constraining this experience, although not from outside the “logical space of reasons,” the total space of relations of rational constraint and justification that governs the logic of empirical concepts.

This responsiveness of objects of experience to conceptual relations within the “logical space of reasons” is bound to look mysterious, as McDowell argues, if we conceive of the natural world as simply the realm of causes and effects and of our experience of it simply in causal terms. He therefore argues for a re-conception of the shape of our openness to nature itself, what he calls a “naturalism of second nature” that presents this openness to a rationally organized world as the normal outcome of a specifically human process of maturation. Drawing on Gadamer’s distinction between a human “world” and a (merely animal) “environment,”²⁹ McDowell argues that we can adequately picture to ourselves what is involved in

responsiveness to reasons only by picturing our normal maturation as coming to be at home in such a world:

Thought can bear on empirical reality only because to be a thinker at all is to be at home in the space of reasons . . .

Now it is not even clearly intelligible to suppose a creature might be born at home in the space of reasons. Human beings are not: they are born mere animals, and they are transformed into thinkers and intentional agents in the course of coming to maturity. This transformation risks looking mysterious. But we can take it in our stride if, in our conception of the *Bildung* that is a central element in the normal maturation of human beings, we give pride of place to the learning of language . . . This is a picture of initiation into the space of reasons as an already going concern; there is no problem about how something describable in those terms could emancipate a human individual from a merely animal mode of living into being a full-fledged subject, open to the world.³⁰

McDowell thus pictures the learning of a language as making intelligible the very possibility of our rational responsiveness to the world, as orienting us to a world whose rational structure is already present as a “going concern.” Drawing further on Gadamer’s hermeneutic description of the constitutive structures of our living in the world, McDowell furthermore conceives of natural language as “a repository for tradition” or in other words a “store of historically accumulated wisdom about what is a reason for what.”³¹ By reminding ourselves that a normal human upbringing involves, decisively, introduction to such a tradition, and with it, openness to a world that is already structured by its determination of the space of reasons, we can, according to McDowell, resolve the dilemmas and contradictions that can otherwise trouble our conception of our relation to the world.

In the perspective of a historical consideration of the analytic tradition’s critique of language, McDowell is, doubtless, right to see the problems and contradictions of our attempts to understand our relation to the world as grounded in the problems of our envisioning, or failing to envision, language in its role in human life. But his attempt to render these problems innocuous simply by reference to the learning of a language is futile. For it presents as self-evident and unmysterious just those features of our relationship to language that repeatedly emerge, in the history of the analytic tradition, as problematic and aporetic, as incapable of positive theoretical description or total elucidation. Following Gadamer in his attempt to assure the distinction between a human and a “merely animal” life by reference to the learning of a language, McDowell writes as if this learning is itself an unproblematic and readily intelligible fact of our normal maturation.³² He conceives of it as giving us access to a determinate structure of concepts, largely laid out in advance and subsequently structuring,

in detail, both our experience of the world and the possibilities of our thought about it. Though he does not develop, even partially, an account of the actual layout of this structure, he takes it as evident that a mere reference to its “embodiment” in a language, conceived as the bearer of a tradition, is enough to verify its existence and remind us of its role in determining the shape of our lives.

In conceiving of the “space of concepts” as positively determined by the structure of a language, McDowell’s account therefore replicates the structuralism that has, as we have seen, repeatedly characterized analytic conceptions of language. Like other instances of this genre, it forecloses the critical question of our relationship to language by prejudging this question in the form of an assumed structuralist account. Citing “initiation into a tradition” as an obvious and unmysterious fact of human life, it insinuates without argument the openness of the determinate contours of such a tradition (or of the more general “space of reasons” that they all share?) to philosophical reflection, their availability to the work of rendering unmysterious our access to the world or our relationship to its concepts. It solves the philosophical problem of our human relation to the world only through reference to a human relationship to language that is bound, once removed from the unargued assumption of a structuralist account, to appear just as problematic.

McDowell argues that we can gain a corrected perspective on the role of language in our lives, one that allows us to solve the problem of “oscillation” he addresses, if we avoid taking what he calls a “sideways-on” perspective on the question of the relationship of language to the world.³³ In other words, the point is that we must avoid conceiving of “language” and the “world” as two separable systems, subsequently somehow to be brought into connection.³⁴ The critical claim echoes one that is in fact common in the recent texts of analytic philosophy that address the “relationship” between language and the world; the claim is that we must refuse a “transcendental perspective,” outside our language or ordinary practices, from which we could evaluate or claim to account for the relationship between language and the world at all. The critical intention underlying the claim is laudable, but as with Austin’s criticism of claims to talk about “meaning,” the success of the critique tends to undermine the terms of criticism. For if it is incoherent to suppose we can “get outside language” in order to talk about it, it is just as incoherent to suppose that we can stay inside it and talk about it from there. If the very terms in which we could, or would, define a boundary between what is “inside” and what is “outside” language are indeed successfully and repeatedly undermined by the progress of analytic reflection on them, then the sense of progress, or resolution, that is suggested by the claim that we must stay “inside” language is illusory too. The critique, at the point of its most explicit development, thus undermines the critical line that it itself would earlier have drawn. Talking about “language” is seen to be equally problematic “from the inside” as “from the

outside,” and the terms of “practices” and “language-games” in which the contemporary discussion would define it are just as problematic as the old ones of structure, system, and “conceptual scheme.”³⁵ It remains that we *do* talk about language, that its structure and possibilities are open for discussion (from within or without) in virtually every moment of our ordinary lives. The trace of its problems in the constancy of our everydayness demands an ever-renewed critique that can no longer claim to achieve the fixity of a perspective (internal or external) that would finally end them.

In a related context, Cavell describes the causes and consequences of what we may be tempted to call (even while recognizing the actual incoherence of the designation) our tendency to “speak outside language games,” our tendency (which is also language’s own tendency) to attempt to replace the particular acts and moments of our struggles with and against language with a statement that would explain our relation to language, all at once:

The reason we cannot say what the thing is in itself is not that there is something that we do not in fact know, but that we have deprived ourselves of the conditions for saying anything in particular. There is nothing we cannot say. That doesn’t mean that we can say *everything*; there is no “everything” to be said. There is nothing we cannot know. That does not mean we can know everything; there is no everything, no totality of facts or things, to be known. To say we do not (cannot) know things-in-themselves is as much a Transcendental Illusion as to say we do. If we say the philosopher has been “misled by grammar”, we must not suppose that this means he has been led to say the wrong thing—as though there was a *right* thing all prepared for him which he missed. It is, rather, as I have been putting it, that he is led into supposing that what he *must* say is something he *means* to say, means as informative. And the question still is: How can we not know (realize) what we are saying; how can we not know that we are not informing ourselves of something when we think we are? Here one might capture a sense of how the problems of philosophy become questions of self-knowledge.³⁶

The linguistic critique that begins by claiming to diagnose the “illusions” of a false or distorted picture of the world ends by undermining the grounds for distinguishing between “truth” and “falsity” in picturing the world at all. Its deeper aim is not, as Cavell puts it, to find the “right” thing to say, the picture that is adequate to the world as it is or that accurately or correctly captures our relation to it. It is, rather, to constantly and recurrently recover, and interrogate, the forms of desire that lead us to this search. Its yield is not a corrected picture of the world, but rather the renewal of our own vision of what leads us to seek one, of how this search is begun and ended, how its hopes are ventured or lost.

IV

The desire to comprehend meaning, in its ordinary as well as theoretical forms, is not only a desire for understanding but also a desire for mastery. The pictures that it fosters aim to determine in advance the possibilities of the application of words by determining the grounding of their sense. In so doing, they respond to (what one might describe as) a fear of words getting away from us, of their meaning escaping our regular ability to anticipate and control the implications of their use; as if without such pictures or the assurances they offer, the meanings of words could vanish into idiosyncrasy or arbitrariness, as if there would then be nothing to ensure the possibility of mutual understanding, nothing to guarantee the possibility of a shared human life. Like the various forms of hegemony and authority that structure the form of society as the phantasmal response to a desire for security or order, they repress the ordinary anxiety to which they respond (that I might not be understood) only to allow it to re-appear, partially obscured and hyperbolized, as the absolute form of an anxiety (that words might never work, that there might not be such a thing as meaning anything ever) that now demands a total response in the form of a vision of the possibilities of sense that holds in general and at all times.³⁷ The pictures or accounts that then offer such a response—pictures of the regular structure of language, and hence of the life that is determined by its practice—then operate in an “overdetermined” fashion to enforce what is, in any case, necessary by their own lights: the determination of meaning by structures of rules that are, though perhaps partially obscure to us, in any case present and capable of being described. In so doing, they inscribe in the everyday life of our practices a characteristic double bind. They present the dictates of reason that they claim to adumbrate as prohibitions of what is in any case, by their own lights, impossible. Articulating the universality of what preconditions all possibilities of sense, they subsequently use this articulation to prohibit or pre-empt specific ways of talking, interpretations of situations, “ways of going on.” The double bind facilitates a distinctive violence, inseparable from our ordinary understanding of language in all of its forms: that of the preclusion or pre-emption, the prejudicing or alienation, of human possibilities of meaning in the form of the predetermination of possibilities of sense.³⁸ The ordinary or philosophical, technical or authoritarian projects that exercise this violence operate, in large part, by projecting the image of this predetermination on the basis of their claim to comprehend the structure of language.

The modern experience in which language, once delivered as a specific object of investigation to theoretical or practical self-consciousness, is subsequently taken as a total structure of signs and accordingly investigated, explained, developed or manipulated as such, is by no means unique to analytic philosophy. It is pervasive, as well, in the technological developments of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Its effects are present

wherever the technologies of communication, computation, and media determine forms of social, political, economic and personal life on the basis of their ability to handle and manipulate language in its “abstract” or informational forms. These developments of media, technology, and social life develop the same desires for standardization and regularization that underwrite the technical and formal methods of symbolic logic, from which they in many cases (in particular in the case of computational technology) actually arose. They shape and form the lives of their participants or consumers, the regular possibilities of meaning open to them, by determining in advance the symbolic forms in which these possibilities can be captured, stored, repeated, transmitted and exchanged.

The technological metaphor by means of which language regularly appears as a total instrument or object of use, subject uniformly to the pre-existing and presupposed desires and intentions of what are supposed to be its “users,” (and by means of which, conversely, the leading forms of what appears as the technologies of information and communication are themselves determined as extensions of the usefulness of language) will, doubtless, take a long time to overcome. It remains one of the most typical and pervasive metaphors of our time. Yet as we have seen, the analytic critique of language, both through its revolutionary criticism of psychologistic and subjectivist assumptions about the ground of language and through its radical interrogation of the category of “use” or “application,” can serve to expose the ultimate ground of this metaphor—and hence its claim to power over the determination of life—as null. The critical projects of continental philosophy and critical theory that have attacked contemporary social and technological forms for their artificial imposition of control over a human life conceived as otherwise innocent of them have not generally portrayed the depth of their actual roots in what is intelligible as the forms of language, as soon as systematic reflection on them begins. The modes of critique that the analytic tradition has developed, grounded in its interrogation of the effects of the objectification of language that begins already with the first question of meaning, could perhaps begin to do so. Their exposure of the structuralist picture of language as grounded in nullity exposes as baseless the claims to power that accompany the systematic technological or social control of language or manipulation of its possibilities. In this, it leaves these phenomena of signification or developments of technology exposed to the baselessness of their own claims to force, demystifying the narratives of transcendence, progress, and development that continue to support them.³⁹

The analytic tradition’s critique of language thus continues and develops the continental critique of metaphysics on the ground of language that underlies its claims, both to truth and to power. It does so, in part, by discovering in the history of philosophy and the forms of ordinary life characteristic fantasies that are also, in each case, intelligible as *fantasies of language*, pictures of the regular relationship of language to life. In a passage

from the *Big Typescript*, Wittgenstein finds the effects of one of these pictures in the texts of Frege that he reads critically:

And here one can appreciate what a disastrous effect the preoccupation with the “sense” of a proposition, with the “thought” that it expresses, has had. For as a result of this, characteristic mental images that attach themselves to the words of a sentence are seen as decisive even when they aren’t, and when everything depends on the technique for using the sentence.—And one *can* say that the proposition has a different sense if it creates a different image. And if I might take the liberty at guessing at Frege’s basic idea in his theory of sense and meaning, I would now continue: that the *meaning* of a proposition, in Frege’s sense, is its use.

... The proposition, or its sense, is not a kind of breathing organism that has a life of its own, and that carries out various exploits, about which we need to know nothing. As if in a manner of speaking we had breathed a soul into it from our soul—its sense—but now it has its own life—like our child—and all we can do is explore it and more or less understand it.

The instinct is guiding us rightly that leads to the questions: How can one know something like that? What reasons can we have to assume that? From what experiences would we deduce such a proposition?, etc.

Sense is not the soul of a proposition. So far as we are interested in it, it must be completely measurable, must disclose itself completely in signs.⁴⁰

Wittgenstein interrogates the picture of sense that he finds still in Frege’s text, a picture of meaning as dependent on the powers of actions and events of thought themselves pictured as mysterious and obscure, a picture of the possibility of linguistic meaning as dependent on the metaphysical (anyway super-sensible) accomplishments of its speakers, the life of an obscure spirit whose breath is the inspiration of sense into the dead matter of signs.⁴² The picture operates by responding to the characteristic obscurity of our understanding of language with the form of an answer that leaves it obscure. It dissimulates the life of language by producing a phantasmatic image of its metaphysical production in the hidden, inner life of its speakers.⁴² To this picture, Wittgenstein responds by repeating and displacing the demand for the intelligibility of language that the metaphysical picture purports to satisfy, but in fact forecloses. He reminds us that what we seek, in understanding language, is not the biography of the hidden life of a subject of experience whose powers and accomplishments must remain obscure, or the pseudo-empirical description of its sublime capacity of inspiring dead signs with the life of significance, but the understanding that produces the clarity of a life in which the inquiry into meaning is no longer felt as (only) a *theoretical* problem.

Staging the metaphysical picture of sense in order to demystify it, Wittgenstein alludes to the legitimacy of those positivist or materialist methods of criticism that have, in the past, taken up parallel claims of metaphysics in

order to expose them as groundless. His critical response thus inherits the methods of an earlier project of positivist thought, one that, demanding the universal “measurability” of all facts and phenomena, has indeed played a decisive role in analytic philosophy’s consideration of language. He says of this project, which opposes the metaphysical picture by exposing its groundlessness in anything that we can call knowledge, that its instinct is the right one. But if his critical reading thereby resists the picture of sense as the soul of language, its reason for doing so is not, essentially, a materialist or positivist one. It is, rather, that sense discloses itself “completely in signs,” that is, in the ordinary life of language itself. The critical reading aims to deliver the life of language to its immanent sense.⁴³

The picture that portrays sense as the soul of language, conceiving of the life of its use as dependent upon the inspiration of matter with spirit, of sound with meaning, is not only contingently or superficially related to the deepest and most enduring forms of metaphysics.⁴⁴ Other regions of twentieth-century philosophical thought have critically considered this picture, demonstrating its regular connection with the same metaphysics of sense that Wittgenstein interrogates, and documenting the effects of its regular appearance in ordinary and philosophical language. In the 1959 text “The Way to Language,” Heidegger quotes from Aristotle’s *De Interpretatione*:

Now, whatever it is [that transpires] in the creation of sound by the voice is a showing of whatever affections there may be in the soul, and the written is a showing of the sounds of the voice. Hence, just as writing is not identical among all [human beings], so too the sounds of the voice are not identical. However, that of which these [sounds and writing] are in the first place a showing are among all [human beings] the identical affections of the soul; and the matters of which these [the affections] form approximating presentations are likewise identical.⁴⁵

Like the quotation from Augustine that begins the text of the *Philosophical Investigations*, the passage stages a fantasy of the life of language, one that understands it as the outward expression of the inner life of the soul, one that seeks to guarantee the possibility of a common linguistic life on the phantasmatic ground of the absolute self-identity of this inner one. The picture, as Heidegger reports, thus culminates in the idealist metaphysics that makes the life of language the recurrent work of the spirit’s labor of self-expression, the realization of spirit in the material world, the historical progress of the animation of matter by soul up to the point of their absolute identity.⁴⁶ This metaphysics takes a long time to complete, but it is already prepared by the conception of subjectivity that, constructing and modulating the distinction between matter and spirit, has long determined the concepts and projects of Western history. The ancient ground of this construction, and the conceptions of subjectivity and objectivity it produces, is perspicuous to modern thought as the envisioning of language itself:

Along with the assertion-character of language (assertion taken in the broadest sense that language, the said and unsaid, means something (a being), and represents it and in representing shapes or covers it over, etc.), language is known as property and tool of man and at the same time as “work.” But this interconnection of language to man counts as something so profound that even the basic determinations of man himself (again as *animal rationale*) are selected in order to characterize language. What is ownmost to man, in terms of body-soul-spirit, is found again in language: the body (word) of language, the soul of language (attunement and shade of feeling and the like) and the spirit of language (what is thought and represented) are familiar determinations of all philosophies of language. This interpretation of language, which one could call anthropological interpretation, culminates in seeing in language itself a symbol for human being. If the question-worthiness of the idea of symbols (a genuine offspring of the perplexity toward being that reigns in metaphysics) is here set aside, then man would have to be grasped as that being that has what is his ownmost in his own symbol, i.e., in the possession of this symbol (*logon echon*).⁴⁷

The ancient metaphysics that defines the human as the *zoon logon echon* presents the life of this being, animal in itself, as essentially determined by its possession of language, and thus by its capacity for, or mastery over, the labor of the progressive manifestation of supersensible meaning in sensible forms that is seen as permitted by this possession. The image and correlate of this picture of the essence of the human is the picture of language that opposes the perceptible character of the sign to its imperceptible sense through the mediation of subjective thought, experience, or intentionality in linguistic “expression.”⁴⁸ The structuralist picture of language develops this picture as one of the figuring of the total structure of language’s signs within the life of the being that speaks, whether this figuring is presented as grounded in the capacities of an individual subject of experience or in the regular practices of a community. Developing this picture to the point of totality at which it undermines itself, the tradition demonstrates the nullity and baselessness of the distinction it attempts to draw between language and life and, thereby, of the everyday metaphysics that seeks to guarantee this distinction. As Heidegger points out, this metaphysics is the most characteristic contemporary expression of the ancient definition (tracing to Aristotle) of the human being as the unity of a life determined as *zoon* with the articulated structure of *logos*. It is unclear whether either this definition, or the forms and practices of everyday “human life” it still supports, can survive the critical inquiry suggested by the results of the analytic tradition, into the forms of metaphysics underlying it and their continuing force over ordinary life.⁴⁹

One of the most characteristic and deep-seated effects of these forms of metaphysics is the picture that presents signs, in their repetition across the

diversity of the contexts of their employment, as self-identical bearers of an unchanging sense, “contents” or “meanings” invisible to the eye and inaudible to the ear, but nevertheless carried by the sign in all the great variety of its employments. The picture extrapolates from the perceptible identity of sign-tokens the unity of an imperceptible identity of sense even as it adduces the arbitrariness of the *particular* connection between sense and sign-type in any *particular* language.⁵⁰ The metaphysics that develops this fantasy of sense finds in this possibility of repetition an immortality of meaning that dissimulates the mortality of everyday speech; it constructs the temporality of language’s life in the medium of the eternal. The critical thought that interrogates the terms of this construction recognizes it as a form of the dissimulation of death, as the projection of an attempt to control the life of language or guarantee its vitality against a standing threat of nullification. The projections and images that try to display the total structure of language attempt this guarantee in forms that are both normally constitutive for our self-understanding and repressive of that very self-understanding.

Yet if its diagnosis of the deep linguistic sources of distorted pictures of our lives allows it to expose the nullity of the claims to power on the basis of which these pictures exert their effects, the critique of language can nevertheless hardly hope to replace them with a better one. For the forms of metaphysics that it diagnoses are, as we have seen, present in the most everyday forms of language itself, and evident already in the first moments of its reflection on its own role in a human life.⁵¹ Thus the critical reflection that once hoped to purge language of illusion and lay bare the form of a finally purified life is consigned, with the intrinsic deepening of its own critical problematic, to trace endlessly and perennially the claims of metaphysics over a linguistic life that would be unintelligible without them, the claims of an immortal distinction between sound and sense, matter and spirit (without which this life would be meaningless) that it must redraw with one hand even as it erases with the other.⁵² This tracing, and erasing, is none other than the envisioning of language with which the analytic tradition began and whose ambiguities, as I have argued, continue to define the tradition’s most significant results. The possibility of its continuance may determine the fate of philosophy in our time.

V

The quotation that serves as the epigraph for this chapter comes from the “Lecture on Ethics” that Wittgenstein prepared, and probably delivered, in Cambridge sometime in 1929 or 1930. Wittgenstein’s aim in the lecture as a whole is to consider the status of “ethical” propositions or, as he puts it, propositions intended to express claims of “absolute” value, for instance claims of intrinsic and non-relational goodness, beauty or worth, or about the meaning of life, or what makes life worth living. His argument is that such claims cannot be expressed by propositions. For if one were to write a

book that describes all the facts concerning the position and movement of bodies in the world, "this book would contain nothing that we would call an ethical judgment or anything that would logically imply such a judgment."⁵³ The statement of *facts*, no matter how complete, does not express anything "sublime, important, or trivial"; facts are all on a level, and their description thus never suffices to express what is aimed at in a judgment of absolute value.⁵⁴ It follows that, if there could be a "science of ethics," "nothing we could ever think or say should be the thing."⁵⁵ The claim to express an absolute value is the claim to express in propositions the elevation, above all others, of a particular state of affairs, for instance (as we may put it) the claim of a path judged "good" to compel us to follow it. But as soon as the claim is stated that way, we can see it to be chimerical. For "no state of affairs has, in itself, what I would like to call the coercive power of an absolute judge."⁵⁶

If we remain tempted to speak of absolute value, we can only express ourselves in metaphors that are actually inadequate to this purpose. In so doing, we fixate on what we may describe as particular experiences which we have, or call to mind, when we find ourselves under this temptation; one such ("entirely personal" and subjective) experience for Wittgenstein is, he says, the experience he would express as "wondering at the existence of the world."⁵⁷ But the attempt to express this experience itself reveals the expression as nonsense; for since it is inconceivable that the world might not have existed, it is incoherent to wonder that it does. No expression of language can capture what the expression of wonder gestures at, for no fact or event, however outlandish, can confirm it. Recognizing the failure of language to express it, we might now put this, Wittgenstein says, as "the experience of seeing the world as a miracle"; and now we might also say that, failing any expression *in* language, it finds expression in the existence of language itself.⁵⁸ This expression is itself nonsensical; as Wittgenstein emphasizes, it puts into words only the feeling of frustration we had before, our frustration with the inability of language to "go beyond the world" to express what we meant. But we can now see this frustration as an expression of the basic tendency that underlay all our formulations. This was the "perfectly, absolutely hopeless one" of "all men who ever tried to write or talk Ethics or Religion," namely "to run against the boundaries of language."⁵⁹

This desire to run against the boundaries of language is perspicuous, in Wittgenstein's own text, as the root of what we may attempt to express as the mystical or transcendental, for instance the vision of the world "*sub specie aeterni*" as a *limited* whole.⁶⁰ It is at the root, as well, of the ambiguous envisioning of language that the analytic tradition takes up from its first moments, and to which, as we have seen, we can trace its most decisive critical results. Appreciating these results, we may follow Wittgenstein in deeming nonsensical all of the expressions that seek to fix the boundaries of language or account for its relation to a life separable from it. But by way of a displacement and renewal of the analytic tradition's linguistic critique, it

remains possible that we might nevertheless venture to take up again the desires at their root, in the irreducible dispersion of language's everyday life.

Within the logically structured language whose possibilities of sense are evident in propositions, whose statements capture a world made up of facts (and so make possible reference to such a world at all), Wittgenstein's expression for wonder at the existence of the world has no sense. Outside this language (but there is no outside, since there is no other language), it has the significance of a gesture. It ostensibly indicates that which it is surely impossible for any gesture within the world to indicate, the singular fact of language, the existence of the possibility of gesturing itself. Thus, by means of a "showing" that could not be reduced to any saying, Wittgenstein evinces that desire whose adequate expression would transcend the world or destroy it, the mute pointing at the boundaries of the world that transmits to human cognition the null space of a beyond. Without delivering its object, in critical forms that, indeed, incessantly trace its withdrawal, the demonstration takes the place of revelation, the purity of lighting that, without explanation, first shows the world as it is.⁶¹

The significance of this gesture is easy to miss. Within the more general critique of language that Wittgenstein himself pioneered, the point of staging the tendency that leads us to misleading or metaphysical forms of words is usually only to repudiate it. Yet as Wittgenstein recognizes, beyond the linguistic criticism of ethical claims as nonsense, the desire that leads us to seek these claims will remain, and is eminently worthy of our respect. Passing through the completion of this criticism of sense, we can even recover this desire in a clarified form for a critical inquiry that takes it up anew.

If Wittgenstein's gesture were successful (but it cannot be) it would ostend the being of the world by gesturing at the existence of what cannot be said, the fact of the existence of language that is itself the presupposition for any saying. The terms of its demonstration would define the paradoxical distance between the world's boundaries and what can always only appear, within it, as a determinate and limited fact: the total fact of the existence of language, the totality of actions, events, and practices that exhaust its actual and possible occurrence. The void space of this distance is the site of wonder, of the paradoxical revelation of the indeterminable possibility of language itself.

Wittgenstein's description of the experience his gesture expresses as that of "seeing the existence of the world as a miracle" formulates his recognition that no fact or set of facts can account for it. There is no way, we may say, to explain the "fact of language" that is more simple or basic than it itself. Thus, if we should attempt to put this fact as the fact "that language exists," it would, like the sentence expressing wonder at the existence of the world, again immediately undermine itself. So, too, would its denial; no proposition justifies either form of words, no proposition can account for, or put in simpler terms, what they would say. It remains that the very ordinary possibility of using the terms "language," "meaning," "sense" and

“significance” constantly and immediately invites us to invoke the existence of what they obscurely seem to name. The ground of this possibility, what we should like to express by asserting the existence of language, then remains, in an essential way, mysterious.

At the end of linguistic demystification, the critical project that took it up therefore faces a more pervasive mystery, at the root of its own claim to envision language and so to practice its criticism. This mystery is no longer a mystification, for it is not a falsification or an error; it will remain even when all the facts are in, when “nothing is hidden” and there is no (factual or scientific) question left to be posed. Yet its appearance in the form of the question of the existence of language, a question which cannot be answered affirmatively or negatively, will remain essential for the acts and events of an ordinary life.

What are the means by which what can never be said thus shows itself, and what does this showing mean for the continuing practice of critical reflection on language and its “forms”? (What is revealed in the revelation of what cannot be said?) If we had to find a basis in language for the possibility of Wittgenstein’s gesture at “the existence of language itself,” we could find it in language’s paradoxical capacity to refer to itself, to take up the question of its own sense and application to the circumstances of life in which linguistic meaning is constantly at issue. This capacity inscribes the extraordinariness of Wittgenstein’s gesture in every word of ordinary language’s consideration of itself; its determinate instances are manifestations of the extraordinary in the everyday, revelations of the basis of significance in the inconsequential moments of an ordinary life.⁶²

We have seen that this paradoxical capacity of ordinary language to refer to itself underlies both the analytic tradition’s detailed and explicit critical envisioning of language and the instabilities to which it is repeatedly prone. Historical retrospection marks the ambiguities of this envisioning as those of language’s own vision of itself. It is the image of the clarity of a life’s constituent forms, as reflected in (what then appears as) the determinate forms of language itself. The analytic tradition’s long-standing and determinative claim to envision language, the root, as we have seen, of its most important results and the basis of any possible claim to continue its methods, must then be deemed neither successful on the level of its original demands nor unsuccessful in its demonstration of (what we may wish to call) the everyday fact of language which grounds the problematic possibility of linguistic self-reference. The critical vision that attempted to master language saw it as a set of possibilities to be described, elucidated, traced and delimited, a silent and unified structure of rules underlying every expression of sense. The inherent paradoxes that this vision encountered, in its more explicit development, demonstrated a more basic and problematic ground for sense in the irreducible actuality of a life. The place of the appearance of these paradoxes is marked by language’s own obscure capacity to demonstrate itself. With this self-demonstration, language shows

itself in a way that cannot be reduced to any description of its structure or any differentiation of its forms. Its critical power is no longer that of the distinction of reality from illusion, of the truth of linguistic forms from their power to mislead the imagination, for the medium of language it irreducibly evinces is the imagination itself. If there is no place outside the forms of language from which the grip of imagination over them can be criticized, there is equally no discernible ground within them from which its productive power can be elucidated or checked. When they are allowed to come to critical expression in these everyday sites, the claims of power that sought to master life by comprehending the possibilities of language can cede to wonder at its very existence.

From the beginning, as we have seen, the analytic tradition's envisioning of language invoked it as a positive object of possible elucidation, elaboration, and description in relation to the possibilities of life that it was recurrently envisioned as determining. The most determinate form of this invocation was what I called, in Chapter 1, the *structuralist* picture of language. For philosophers throughout the tradition, and even today, it formulated the possible intelligibility of language to the theoretical reflection that would elucidate it. It formulated, as well, the claim of this reflection to elucidate the points of linguistic reason's force over a human life, to describe the ground of the "force of the better reason" in determining thought and action. But the picture was unstable in relation to the actuality of the life it aimed to capture. And the critical results that articulated the instability, in particular (but not only) Wittgenstein's rule-following considerations, demonstrated the essentially unforclosable openness of life to what then appears as language's "use," at every moment of its practice. Showing the actual futility of any attempt finally to master life's possibilities in the forms of language, they opened an uncrossable theoretical gap between the symbolic expression of a rule and the instances of action or behavior that may be said to amount to following it.

Henceforth, this gap can be the site of a life that cannot be explained in terms of possibilities of language, even as it recurrently takes up again language's envisioning of itself. The ground of life on which structuralism would seek to situate the ultimate possibility of sense, by reference to which it would seek to guarantee the possibility of linguistic meaningfulness, is revealed as null and void. The forms of explanatory or theoretical discourse that would seek to express it cede to a mute gesturing, the ostension of a ground of language that is everywhere presupposed but nowhere describable.

The tradition's demonstration of the nullity at the center of language's structure can then be seen as the revelation to everyday thought and practice of what Giorgio Agamben calls "The Idea of Language":

The fulfilled revelation of language is a word completely abandoned by God. And human beings are thrown into language without having a voice or a divine word to guarantee them a possibility of escape from

the infinite play of meaningful propositions. Thus we finally find ourselves alone with our words; for the first time we are truly alone with language, abandoned without any final foundation. This is the Copernican revolution that the thought of our time inherits from nihilism: we are the first human beings who have become completely conscious of language.⁶³

To an age in which the self-consciousness of language is thus complete, the desire to run up against the limits of language that Wittgenstein diagnoses is visible as the previously obscure root of every attempt to articulate propositions of ethics or religion. It finds obscure expression, in particular, in the search for transcendence, what we can now see as the search for a position outside language from which it would be possible to comprehend, describe, trace or express the being of language as a whole, to determine the boundaries of its sense or the possibilities of its reference to a world conceived as outside it. As we have seen over the course of this work, in a double movement of criticism that can be considered its own specific method, the analytic tradition repeatedly moves to formulate this position and then repudiate this very formulation. At the limit of this doubled criticism, it will no longer be possible to discern the logical structures of language or identify the specific points of their force in constraining the possibilities of a human life. There will be, then, no ultimate ground for language in life, no moment of life or component of its pursuit that will be identifiable as the source of language or the basis of the possibility of meaning. But the everyday critical modalities that constantly call language into question on the basis of its own vision of itself also constantly inscribe the nullity of its center, its freedom from the claims of power that would master it from without or within.

With respect to a metaphysics whose forms are as old as language itself and whose specific claims operate anywhere and everywhere we speak, the critical results of analytic philosophy thus do not mark its end or overcoming, the death of what is surely immortal. But they do reveal the nullity of its specific claims to power by demonstrating the nullity of the fact of language that they claim to master. The revelation of language that the analytic tradition has developed thus witnesses the possibility that these claims, grounded in the imposition of distinctions that themselves stand exposed as groundless, could (without denying the reality of their effects or foreclosing the continuance of their memory) be allowed to lapse into a correlative insignificance along with that of the history they have organized. This insignificance is the erasure of the line that metaphysics traces at the center of a human life between that life itself and the language that it speaks.

The radical vision of language that transformed philosophy at the beginning of the twentieth century and continues to support its deepest critical modes therefore reveals the sense of words and the significance of symbols, everywhere and always, as phenomena of a ground that can only be

incomprehensible to it. It bears witness to the paradoxical possibility of what remains, within the metaphysics of a language that continues to pre-determine every possibility of the significance of a human life, impossible or inconceivable, ineffable or unspeakable: the dream of the self-revelation of a life without mystification or violence. Within the metaphysics that still determines the sign as the mute bearer of memory, archive of the violence of life and guarantor, beyond death, of the immortality of its significance, such a life remains insignificant. Open to the play of phenomena of sense and significance without determining them in the forms of possession, intention, mastery or control that have regularly defined them, it gives no sense to its language beyond that of the immediacy of its own breath. It thereby opens itself to an experience of language which, beyond the violence of history and the regimes of its force, abandons its life to the peace of what remains. The vision of language that would have comprehended this life ends by exposing it to its own immanence. That we who speak and write become incomprehensible to ourselves may be the stake, and the promise, of the clarity of its light.

Notes

1 Introduction

- 1 Wittgenstein (1934), pp. 3–4.
- 2 A methodological directive for this clarification comes from Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* (henceforth: *TLP* 6.521:

The solution to the problem of life is seen in the vanishing of the problem.

(Is this not the reason why those who have found after a long period of doubt that the sense of life became clear to them have then been unable to say what constituted that sense?)

- 3 In what follows, I use “meaning” or “linguistic meaning” to characterize anything that can be the answer to the questions “What is the meaning of ‘...’?” or “What do you mean by ‘...’?” where ‘...’ is a sign or sequence of signs. By “meaningfulness” I mean whatever serves to answer the question *whether* such a sign or sequence has meaning (in a particular context and on a particular occasion of use).
- 4 Within the logical space of structural views, it is possible to distinguish several sub-variants. One variant—what we might call “content-structuralism”—holds that the basic elements structured or organized by the logic of language are already *contents* before they are so structured or organized; these may be, for instance, the basic elements of phenomenal experience, which are sometimes thought of as having “intrinsic” or non-relational content. (This kind of view was held, for example, by Russell (1914) and Schlick (1932)). These can be distinguished from views (like those of Carnap (1934) and Saussure (1913)) that hold that the basic elements only get or have their contents *in virtue of* their roles in the relational or differential structure in which they participate. Cross-cutting this classification is a distinction between reductive and non-reductive forms of structuralism. Reductive forms hold that structured elements are reducible to simpler, constituent ones. Non-reductive forms, by contrast, hold that description of the structure of an element may be defined in terms of its relations of similarity or difference with other elements, but does not necessarily involve its decomposition into simpler elements.
- 5 The commitments of structuralism so defined are obviously closely related (especially if one brackets number five) to some of the assumptions underlying the project of the analysis of *generative* and *transformational* grammar suggested by Chomsky (1957; 1965). Some of the issues affecting structuralism that I discuss below also certainly affect the prospects for the success of Chomsky's

classic project. Nevertheless I have largely left the projects of transformational linguistics out of discussion, since (whatever the successes of their description of an underlying universal grammar of phrase structure and sentence formation) they have had great difficulty handling the issue of the relationship of the syntax they describe to the *semantics* or *meanings* of ordinary terms and utterances (for some discussion, see, for example, Searle 1972).

- 6 In what follows, I use “structure” to mean any totality of elements that, minimally, (i) bear intelligible relations of identity, similarity, and difference to one another and (ii) are intelligibly interconnected by rules, regularities, or principles governing or underlying these relations.
- 7 Hahn *et al.* (1929), p. 309.
- 8 Hahn *et al.* (1929), pp. 306–7.
- 9 Cf. Carnap’s statement in the 1932 article “The Elimination of Metaphysics Through Logical Analysis of Language”:

The researches of applied logic or the theory of knowledge, which aim at clarifying the cognitive content of scientific statements and thereby the meanings of the terms that occur in the statements, by means of logical analysis, lead to a positive and a negative result. The positive result is worked out in the domain of empirical science; the various concepts of the various branches of science are clarified; their formal-logical and epistemological connections are made explicit. In the domain of metaphysics, including all philosophy of value and normative theory, logical analysis yields the negative result *that the alleged statements in this domain are entirely meaningless*. Therewith a radical elimination of metaphysics is attained, which was not yet possible from the earlier antimetaphysical standpoints.

(Carnap 1932a, pp. 60–1)

- 10 It is instructive to compare Moritz Schlick’s description, written in 1931, of the revolution in philosophy to which he saw the new logical methods as leading:

There are consequently no questions which are in principle unanswerable, no problems which are in principle insoluble. What have been considered such up to now are not genuine questions, but meaningless sequences of words. To be sure, they look like questions from the outside, since they seem to satisfy the customary rules of grammar, but in truth they consist of empty sounds, because they transgress the profound inner rules of logical syntax discovered by the new analysis.

(Schlick 1931, pp. 55–6)

- 11 Frege (1879), p. 49.
- 12 Russell (1900), p. 8.
- 13 Russell (1905).
- 14 Russell (1914).
- 15 Russell formulated the slogan of this practice of analysis: “The supreme maxim in scientific philosophizing is this: Wherever possible, logical constructions are to be substituted for inferred entities” (Russell 1914, p. 112). The motto subsequently served as the epigraph for Carnap’s *Der Logische Aufbau der Welt*.
- 16 Frege’s critique of psychologism about logic, particularly in the *Grundlagen* (Frege 1884), was anticipated by nineteenth-century philosophical logicians such as Bolzano and Lotze, who had held that the contents of thoughts must be sharply distinguished from the psychological events that lead to their being thought, judged, or entertained. In drawing this distinction, and underlying it

with his Platonistic conception of mental contents, Frege most often cited Mill as his polemical target. Nevertheless, it is not clear that Mill actually held the psychologistic theory that Frege attributed to him; for discussion, see, for example, Skorupski (1998). Frege's critique of psychologism was also the basis of his notorious attack on Husserl's first work, *The Philosophy of Arithmetic*, in 1894.

- 17 In 1959, Russell described his initial motivations this way:

It was towards the end of 1898 that Moore and I rebelled against both Kant and Hegel. Moore led the way, but I followed closely in his footsteps ... I felt ... a great liberation, as if I had escaped from a hot house onto a windswept headland. In the first exuberance of liberation, I became a naïve realist and rejoiced in the thought that grass really is green.

(Russell 1959, p. 22)

- 18 The hope to “structuralize” science by showing its logical structure—and thus demonstrate the objectivity of its claims by purging them of any dependence on “subjective” or “ostensively indicated” elements was, in particular, the central ambition of the “construction theory” that Carnap pursued in his influential *Der Logische Aufbau der Welt* of 1928. See, for example, Carnap (1928), section 16.
- 19 Throughout much of his career, Russell insisted that the proper task of philosophy must be the investigation of “the world” rather than language or thought. Prior to 1918, he saw language as “transparent,” and even afterwards he conceived of the task of logical analysis as showing the structure of the world rather than language (Monk 1997, pp. 38–40). The question of Frege's relationship to the philosophy of language is equally complex. For helpful discussions, see Dummett 1981b, ch. 3, Sluga (1997) and Hylton (1990), ch. 6.
- 20 (Leibniz 1679, p. 8). Compare Frege's description, in *Begriffsschrift*, of the powers of his new conceptual notation (Frege 1879, p. 49).
- 21 Carnap (1928), section 3.
- 22 Michael Friedman has convincingly documented the pronounced legacy of post-Kantian philosophy in the logical positivism of Reichenbach, Schlick, and Carnap. See Friedman (1999), especially chs. 1, 3, and 6.
- 23 Although Schlick and Carnap initially conceived of this program, in strongly reductionist terms, as involving the isolation of the private, experiential content of any empirical proposition, their Circle colleague Otto Neurath conceived of the project differently. Recognizing that it would be difficult or impossible to determine the empirical content of each proposition individually, Neurath recommended a *holistic* approach that would identify the content of whole bodies of theory in terms of their public, empirical verification. Nevertheless, Neurath shared Carnap and Schlick's adherence to a structuralist picture of language. For more on the methodological differences and similarities, and their implications for the subsequent “protocol sentence debate,” see, for example, Coffa (1991), Uebel (1992), Oberdan (1996), Friedman (1999), and Livingston (2004), ch. 2.
- 24 See Livingston (2004), ch. 2.
- 25 The terms “analytic” or “analytical philosophy” themselves, though used occasionally as early as the 1930s, were not in widespread use until after 1940 (Richardson 2005; Hacker 1997).
- 26 A. J. Ayer gave the principle of verification a clear and influential early expression in *Language, Truth, and Logic* (Ayer 1936, p. 35). This formulation was responsible for much of the discussion that followed, but the verification principle itself had actually played only a small role in the thinking of Carnap, Schlick, and the other members of the Vienna Circle. For these philosophers,

the determination of the empirical meaning of individual propositions was less important than the overall determination, by analytical means, of the structure of scientific concepts.

27 Quine (1950).

28 Significantly, even when the new generation of philosophers rejected the metaphor of “analysis,” they still tended to employ metaphors that imply a structuralist picture of language and the interrelationships of its terms. Ryle, for instance, described his project in *The Concept of Mind* as aiming to “rectify the logical geography” of concepts (Ryle 1949, p. 7). Along similar lines, Strawson (1992) has defended a “connective” style of analysis that, while avoiding reductionism, nevertheless preserves the project of tracing structural, grammatical relations among concepts.

29 Attention to the continuity of structuralism in determining the main problematics of the analytic tradition therefore provides grounds for doubting the accuracy of a standard and received picture of the history of the tradition as a whole. On this standard and received picture, the tradition has consisted largely of two distinct phases: an initial “positivist” phase dedicated to a reductionist, foundationalist and methodologically solipsistic project of “conceptual analysis” and a “postpositivist” phase determined by the repudiation of this original project and the triumph of holistic and anti-foundationalist projects of reflecting on language as a public and intersubjective phenomenon. (For the broad contours of this picture, see, for example, Clarke (1997), Soames (2003), and Rorty (1979); it has its roots in the brief retrospective sketch of the background to his own repudiation of the analytic/synthetic distinction that Quine already gave in Quine (1950)). As we shall see, however, the historical continuity of the tradition’s most prevalent conceptions of language is much greater than this picture would suggest, and it obscures the underlying dynamics of some of the tradition’s most pervasive conceptual determinants, from its earliest phases to the present (see also Livingston 2005; 2006).

30 Much recent work has been devoted to the question of the best way to define and understand the tradition as a unity. See, for example, Hacker (1997) and (1998), Ross (1998), Matar (1998), Rorty (1979), Dummett, (1994), Føllesdal (1997). Sluga (1997) Typically, these considerations fall into one of three broad categories. First, there are those, like Dummett (1994) and Kenny (1995), who suggest defining the tradition in terms of one or another doctrine or claim, often about the nature of philosophy, held by its practitioners. Typical candidates include the claims that philosophy of language is fundamental to all philosophy, or that a semantic clarification of language is more fundamental than epistemology. Second, there are those who aim to define the tradition as a unity of methods or “styles”; commentators who fall into this category often cite, for instance, the typical methods of “conceptual analysis” or simply a looser and more general preference for clear argument and rational justification (see, for example, Føllesdal (1997); Rorty (1979), Monk (1997)). Finally, some philosophers, (e.g. Hacker 1998), noting the large variations in doctrines and methods across the scope of twentieth century analytic philosophy, despair of such a unifying definition in terms of commitments or methods and define the tradition, instead, simply as a loosely connected historical/genealogical unity. (Some of these commentators employ the Wittgensteinian notion of “family resemblances” to subsume what are in fact a large variety of different projects, with different aims and results, marked by individual similarities but lacking any one unifying element). Without taking a position on this difficult question of the definition of the tradition as a whole, I simply aim to identify the interlinked commitments of the structuralist picture of language as one that has played a significant role, in various ways, in *many* (though not by any means all) of the

projects and theories that are commonly recognized as part of the tradition. For more on the specific legacy of structuralism within this tradition, see Livingston (2004) and Peregrin (2002).

- 31 The tendency to take “analytic philosophy” to be equivalent to the (presumably now repudiated) project of “conceptual analysis” *simpliciter*, and accordingly to deny that there is anything interesting to say about its legacy for contemporary projects, is evident, for instance, in Rorty’s (1979) dismissive discussion of the contemporary use of the label “analytic philosophy”:

If there are no intuitions into which to resolve concepts . . . nor any internal relations among concepts to make possible “grammatical discoveries” . . . then it is indeed hard to imagine what an “analysis” might be . . .

I do not think that there any longer exists anything identifiable as ‘analytic philosophy’ except in some such stylistic or sociological way.

(p. 172)

Rorty is right to hold that the characteristic methods of analytic philosophy persist largely in a stylistic register; but he is wrong to think that this register is innocent in determining philosophical projects or that there is no need to reflect on it. For a recent attempt to rehabilitate a form of “conceptual analysis” in the context of the philosophy of mind, see Chalmers and Jackson (2001).

- 32 As early as 1913, Saussure defined language as a system of “differences without positive terms.” (Saussure 1913, p. 653). Benveniste gives a clear and general articulation of structuralism in the article “Categories of Thought and Language”:

Now this language has a configuration in all its parts and as a totality. It is in addition organized as an arrangement of distinct and distinguishing “signs,” capable themselves of being broken down into interior units or of being grouped into complex units. This great structure, which includes sub-structures of several levels, gives its *form* to the content of thought.

(Benveniste 1958, p. 55)

One chief difference, however, between the structuralist picture, as it appears in the texts of Saussure and Benveniste, and the picture that is usually presupposed in the analytic tradition is that the Saussurian picture does not typically see the significant relations between signs as primarily, or predominantly, *logical* in character.

- 33 Ryle (1949), Austin (1947), Sellars (1955), Wittgenstein (1951), and Quine (1960), in particular, were seen as reversing methodologically solipsistic prejudices earlier prevalent of theories of mind and experience. In fact the philosopher who had first formulated the project of “methodological solipsism”—namely Carnap—had already abandoned this position, in favor of a “physicalist” position influenced by Neurath, as early as 1931; see Carnap (1931) and (1932b).
- 34 Quine gives an exemplary statement of the picture of language as inculcated and controlled by means of public, social practices in *Word and Object*:

“Ouch” is a one-word sentence which a man may volunteer from time to time by way of laconic comment on the passing show. The correct occasions of its use are those attended by painful stimulation. Such use of the word, like the correct use of language generally, is inculcated in the individual by training on the part of society; and society achieves this despite not sharing the individual’s pain. Society’s method is in principle that of rewarding the utterance of “Ouch” when the speaker shows some further evidence of

sudden discomfort, say a wince, or is actually seen to suffer violence, and of penalizing the utterance of “Ouch” when the speaker is visibly untouched and his countenance unruffled . . . Society, acting solely on over manifestations, has been able to train the individual to say the socially proper thing in response even to socially undetectable stimulations.

(Quine 1960, p. 5)

- 35 See, for example, Brandom (1994), Rorty (1979), Kripke (1982) and Davidson (1984). Brandom’s statement of the presumed identity of language and social practices, on the first page of the preface to *Making it Explicit*, is typical: “This book is an investigation into the nature of *language*: of the social practices that distinguish us as rational, indeed logical, concept-mongering creatures—knowers and agents.” (p. xi). The idea of a basis for linguistic behavior in social practices has also played a major role in various recent attempts at *rapprochement* between analytic philosophy and the tradition of critical theory and hermeneutics. For instance, Habermas (1981) reads what he takes to be Wittgenstein’s account of linguistic practice as a contribution to the theory of communicative rationality that he aims to work out; and Apel (1972) construes participation in a Wittgensteinian “language-game” to be a pragmatic precondition for any possibility of mutual understanding or communication.
- 36 A particularly explicit formulation of this kind of interpretation is given by Bloor (1983). Among commentators who favor this kind of interpretation, it is typically to take Wittgenstein’s supposed failure to develop such a theory as an indication of his “quietism.” See, for example, Brandom (1994), pp. xii–xiii.
- 37 Here, the exegetical situation is complicated by the internal complexity of Wittgenstein’s method and the tendency of commentators to read his remarks, out of contexts, as contributions to a philosophical theory of language or to the expression of what are supposed to be his “views.” A remark that has regularly been misread in this way is *Philosophical Investigations* (henceforth: *PI*) 202:

And hence also “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.

In context, the point of the remark is not to introduce or adumbrate a theory of practices, but to bring out the regularity that characterizes anything we will ordinarily call “following a rule” and does not (could not, on its own terms) characterize anything we call “private experience.” Just a few paragraphs later, at *PI* 208, Wittgenstein makes it clear that his discussion of regularity does not subsume a theory of practices, but rather refers to a kind of teaching (of a first language) that is not, *and cannot be*, captured by a communicable concept of practice.

- 38 Wittgenstein (1934), p. 5.
- 39 Wittgenstein’s use of this method of diagnosis, with particular reference to Frege, occurs more than once in his corpus. For instance, in *Philosophical Grammar* he gives it a briefer formulation:

In attacking the formalist conception of arithmetic, Frege says more or less this: these petty explanations of the signs are idle once we *understand* the signs. Understanding would be something like seeing the picture from which all the rules followed, or a picture that makes them all clear. But Frege does not seem to see that such a picture would itself be another sign, or a calculus to explain the written one to us.

(Wittgenstein 1933a, p. 40)

On signs and their “life,” compare, also, *PI* 432: “Every sign *by itself* seems dead. *What* gives it life?—In use it is *alive*. Is life breathed into it there?—Or is the *use* its life?” and (Wittgenstein 1933b, p. 3):

I want to say: one can’t interpret language in its entirety.

An interpretation is always just one interpretation, in contrast to another. It attaches itself to a sign and integrates it into a wider system.

All I can do in language is to say something: one thing. (To say one thing within the realm of the possibilities of what I could have said.) (No metaling.)

When Frege argues against a formal conception of arithmetic he is saying, as it were: These pedantic explanations of symbols are idle if we understand the symbols. And understanding is like seeing a picture from which all the rules follow (and by means of which they become understandable). But Frege doesn’t see that this picture is in turn nothing but a sign, or a calculus, that explains the written calculus to us.

- 40 Within the twentieth-century projects Priest considers, at least, the operator of transcendence is typically *diagonalization*. Given an arbitrary set of elements, all of which are within the larger set, diagonalization generates an element that is in the larger set but not in the smaller one. The method, which was crucial to Cantor’s proof of the existence of multiple infinities, also plays a crucial role in the proof of Gödel’s incompleteness theorem.
- 41 See Livingston (2004), ch. 2.
- 42 See, for example, Haugeland (1998), Searle (1992).
- 43 For more on the genealogy of the concept of “qualia” (which derives from C. I. Lewis (1929)) and their relationship to the problem of ostensive definition, see Livingston (2004), ch. 1.
- 44 For Neurath’s structuralist criticism of Schlick’s views on the given contents of experience, see Neurath (1931), (1932), and (1934); see also discussion in Livingston (2004), ch. 2.
- 45 As Priest notes, the underlying reason for the inclosure paradox in all of its forms is the phenomenon of self-reference; both the *closure* and the *transcendence* operations typically rely on some form of it. Here, the situation is no different; it is the capacity of language to include terms (such as “language,” “meaning,” and “reference”) that refer to itself and to its relationship to the world that involves systematic theories of the referents of these terms in the paradoxical situation under discussion here.
- 46 The internal ambiguities of structuralism I discuss here also do not (much) affect the prospects, positive or negative, for giving a generative and transformative grammar of natural languages in the sense of Chomsky (1957; 1965). For the problem that Wittgenstein identifies in Frege’s conception of signs and their use affects structuralist theories of language only when they attempt to characterize and describe in structural terms (in addition to describing the syntax or abstract combinatorial structure of a language) the basis of (what we ordinarily grasp as) linguistic *meaning* or “semantics.” For some discussion of the relationship of Wittgenstein’s rule-following considerations to Chomsky’s project, see Baker (1981), Peacocke (1981), and Chomsky (1986).
- 47 See, e.g., *TLP* 4.112
- 48 For the interpretation, see, for example, Diamond (1991) and (2000), Conant (1989) and (2000), and Ricketts (1996).
- 49 At *TLP* 5.5563, Wittgenstein held that:

In fact, all the propositions of our everyday language, just as they stand, are in perfect logical order.—That utterly simple thing, which we have to formulate here, is not a likeness of truth, but the truth itself in its entirety.

Russell, in his 1922 introduction to the *Tractatus*, notoriously misunderstood the implications of this remark.

- 50 Hintikka and Hintikka (1986), along similar lines, interpret Wittgenstein's philosophical thought as a whole as determined by the guiding opposition between a conception of language as a calculus (whose principles could be determined, described and explained from an outside position) and that of "language as a universal medium." On the latter conception, it would be impossible to present the structure of language exhaustively, since any description is still caught up in the system it would aim to describe. Though Hintikka and Hintikka are right to assert that much of the productiveness of Wittgenstein's thought can be traced to the productive tension between these two views of language—corresponding to the two parts of Priest's "inclosure schema"—they misleadingly read into Wittgenstein a "linguistic relativism" that would deny the possibility of knowledge of things as they are "in themselves", independently of language.
- 51 Carnap (1934b), pp. 9–10.
- 52 See, for example, the project of *eliminative materialism* defined by Churchland (1981) and Rorty (1965).
- 53 Frege (1879), preface; compare Frege (1892), which makes the sense/reference distinction explicit.
- 54 It is striking, in reference to the most usual way of talking Wittgenstein's "language-game" concept, that here he explicitly and decisively *rejects* any claim that language is in fact something like a game. Such comparisons are, as he says, *useful* to bring certain features to light, but to take it that he is claiming that languages *are* games is to commit just the misunderstanding that he warns against here. Indeed, "language games" are, for Wittgenstein, *always* objects of comparison and never (as the most usual interpretation suggests) the basis of a theoretical *explanation* of language itself (cf. *PI* 109). In the *Big Typescript*, he makes this explicit:

When I describe certain simple language-games, I don't do this so I can use them to construct gradually the processes of a fully developed language—or of thinking—(Nicod, Russell), for this only results in injustices.—Rather, I present the games as games and allow them to shine their illuminating effects on particular problems.

(Wittgenstein 1933b, p. 156)

- 55 Kripke says in the introductory chapter of *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* that the interpretation first occurred to him in the academic year 1962–3; it was first presented in seminar at Princeton in 1965 and subsequently, to a broader audience, at the Wittgenstein conference in London, Ontario in 1976.
- 56 Kripke (1982), pp. 8–11.
- 57 Kripke (1982), p. 55.
- 58 Kripke (1982), p. 66.
- 59 Kripke (1982), pp. 74–75.
- 60 Kripke (1982), pp. 96–7.; cf. pp. 92–3:

Now Wittgenstein's general picture of language, as sketched above, requires for an account of a type of utterance not merely that we say under what conditions an utterance of that type can be made, but also what role and

utility in our lives can be ascribed to the practice of making this type of utterance under such conditions. We say of someone else that he follows a certain rule when his responses agree with our own and deny it when they do not; but what is the utility of this practice? The utility is evident and can be brought out by considering again a man who buys something at the grocer's. The customer, when he deals with the grocer and asks for five apples, expects the grocer to count as he does, not according to some bizarre non-standard rule; and so, if his dealings with the grocer involve a computation, such as "68 + 57", he expects the grocer's responses to agree with his own. . . . Our entire lives depend on countless such interactions, and on the "game" of attributing to others the mastery of certain concepts or rules, thereby showing that we expect them to behave as we do.

- 61 For a helpful overview and review, see Boghossian (1989).
- 62 For a sustained critical discussion of the significance of the "natural" as it may be seen to operate in this, and similar, contexts, see Cavell (1979), ch. 5, "Natural and Conventional." Compare, also, Cavell's recent discussion of the difference between his and Kripke's ways of understanding the upshot of Wittgenstein's "rule-following" paradox, with respect to the threat that skepticism represents, in Cavell (2005), pp. 134–8.
- 63 See, for example, Saussure (1913); Husserl (1900), especially Investigation 1, and Cassirer (1929). For more on some of these points of comparison, see, for example, Dummett (1994) and Friedman (2000).
- 64 Heidegger (1927), p. 20.
- 65 Some instructive recent historical work has focused on the notorious episode of Carnap's rejection, in the 1932 article "The Overcoming of Metaphysics Through the Logical Analysis of Language," of Heidegger's claims about the relationship of being to nothingness in his 1929 Freiburg inaugural lecture "What Is Metaphysics?" For clear and insightful discussions, see, for example, Friedlander (1998) and Friedman (2000). As Friedman argues, understanding the significance of the episode requires that we appreciate the deep roots in neo-Kantianism that Heidegger and Carnap shared, as well as the grounds for the personal and philosophical dispute between the two young philosophers that came to a head in the disputation between Heidegger and Cassirer over the interpretation of Kant's philosophy at Davos in 1929.
- 66 Derrida (1966).
- 67 Derrida (1966), pp. 279–80.
- 68 Derrida (1966), p. 280.
- 69 For decades, analytic philosophers have routinely ignored or ridiculed Derrida's project. An unfortunate paradigm for their reaction to it has been Searle's (1977) scathing critical response to Derrida's interpretation of Austin in Derrida (1972). Derrida's side of the polemic, together with an extended response to Searle's criticism, is published in Derrida (1988). Two recent books (Staten 1986 and Wheeler 2000) attempt to remedy this situation by pointing out connections between the project of deconstruction and some of the main results of analytic philosophy. The connections they draw are salutary and may certainly make Derrida's concerns more accessible to analytic philosophers. In both cases, however the interpretations of Derrida are vitiated by a tendency to take the object of deconstruction's critical project with respect to the history of philosophy to be something of a straw man—Wheeler, for instance, takes Derrida to be criticizing the tendency to believe in the existence of a "magic language" (p. 3) whose terms are "self-interpreting" in determining their own referents; and Staten holds Derrida and Wittgenstein to be unified in criticizing a general concept of "form" tracing to Aristotle (p. 5). Briefer, but more critically specific

discussions of connections between Derrida's project and some of the concerns of analytic philosophy are Priest (2003), ch. 14, and Mulhall (2001). See also Cavell's expansive discussion of the issues—especially the question of philosophical “seriousness”—at stake among Austin, Derrida, and Searle in Cavell (1994), ch. 2.

2 Frege on the context principle and psychologism

- 1 Frege (1884), p. 90 (p. x in original).
- 2 Frege (1884), p. 108 (p. 71 in original).
- 3 Frege (1884), pp. 109–110 (p. 73 in original). The principle expressed here, to the effect that numbers can be defined in terms of judgments of equinumerosity, traces to Hume and has recently become the basis for an attempt to rehabilitate Frege's original logicist program. For a useful review of the “neo-logicist” project, see MacBride (2003).
- 4 Interpretation of the role of the context principle in Frege's philosophy as a whole is notoriously complicated, not only because Frege seems, after the *Grundlagen*, to accord it less and less emphasis, but also because it is not immediately clear how to read the principle itself in the light of the distinction he would later draw between sense and reference. See Dummett (1981a), pp. 495–6 and Dummett (1981b), pp. 369–85 for discussion of this issue. Another exegetical obstacle to understanding the significance of the context principle is posed by the fact that Frege's statements of the principle, even in the *Grundlagen* alone, vary widely in their strength and level of applicability. (see, e.g., Baker and Hacker 1984, pp. 199–205).
- 5 Frege (1918).
- 6 See for example Husserl (1900), Investigation II. Frege had famously reviewed Husserl's earlier work, *The Philosophy of Arithmetic*, in 1894; Frege had found it rife with psychologistic prejudices. Husserl seems to have accepted the criticism in developing the *Logical Investigations*' deeply anti-psychologistic theory of logic. For useful commentary on the exchange, see Dummett (1994).
- 7 Now all those features of language that result only from the interaction of speaker and listener . . . have no counterpart in my formula language, since here the only thing that is relevant in a judgment is that which influences its *possible consequences*. Everything that is necessary for a valid inference is fully expressed; but what is not necessary is mostly not even indicated; *nothing is left to guessing*.

(Frege 1879, p. 54 (p. 3 in original))

For an instructive recent discussion of the connections between Frege's inferentialism and his contextualism and anti-psychologism, see Conant (2000), especially pp. 180–2.

- 8 For a contemporary formulation of the same project, see Brandom (1994), ch. 2.
- 9 Dummett (1981a), pp. 193–4.
- 10 Dummett (1991), pp. 244–5.
- 11 Compare *Tractatus* 4.024: “To understand a proposition means to know what is the case if it is true.”
- 12 Dummett (1956), p. 492.
- 13 Dummett (1981b), p. 383.
- 14 Dummett (1981a), p. 194.
- 15 At this point a number of difficult problems arise which are, however, irrelevant to the appreciation of the point Frege is making . . . we may raise the question how we recognize that someone has this knowledge, since we can only test his understanding of finitely many sentences. (Here we may feel inclined to have

recourse to the notion, notoriously difficult to explain, of a type of context: a notion which, it seems to me, plays an important but almost unacknowledged role in Wittgenstein's *Investigations*).

(Dummett 1956, p. 493)

- 16 Diamond (1978, p. 79) raises the same question, albeit quickly and in passing, against Dummett's way of seeing the significance of Frege's supposed appeal to the use of a word. Elsewhere, however, Diamond, though at pains to resist Dummett's reading of the context principle as establishing simply the ("truistic") claim that a sentence is the smallest unit which may be considered to accomplish any task in the practice of a language, nevertheless concurs uncritically with the suggestion that understanding senses may be taken to be a matter simply of grasping rules of use. See, e.g., Diamond (1980), p. 111.
- 17 For the distinction, see Chomsky (1965).
- 18 Compare Kripke's (1982) discussion of a "dispositionalist" response to Wittgenstein's rule-following paradox: pp. 22–8.
- 19 Davidson himself normally calls the kind of theory he is after a "theory of interpretation" or a "theory of truth"; he says (Davidson 1974a, p. 142) that such a theory "can be used to describe what every interpreter [of a language] knows." There has been some debate over whether such a theory can be construed as a theory of what is picked out by the pre-theoretic notion of "meaning," or should rather be taken as a replacement for this notion; see for example Lepore and Ludwig (2005) for an extended discussion.
- 20 For the project, see Davidson (1967; 1970; 1973a; 1973b).
- 21 Davidson (1965; 1973b); cf. Dummett (1975).
- 22 See for example the articles collected in Davidson and Harman (1973).
- 23 See for example Burge (1986), Elugardo (1999), Lepore (1999) and the extended and comprehensive discussion in Lepore and Ludwig (2007); Davidson takes up the issue of metaphor himself in Davidson (1978).
- 24 For the term "modesty," see Dummett (1975) ("What is a Theory of Meaning?"). Cf., also, McDowell (1997)
- 25 Cf. McDowell's gloss on this point in McDowell (1997), pp. 116–17.
- 26 Dummett (1981a), p. 227; 1991, pp. 238–9.
- 27 See for example *TLP* 4.022: "A proposition shows its sense. A proposition shows how things stand if it is true. And it says that they do so stand."
- 28 Frege (1903).
- 29 Frege (1903), pp. 83–4 (p. 91 in original).
- 30 See the epigraph to Chapter 1, above.
- 31 "The mistake we are liable to make could be expressed thus: We are looking for the use of a sign, but we look for it as though it were an object *co-existing* with the sign." (Wittgenstein 1934, p. 3)
- 32 The immediate basis for Wittgenstein's use of the metaphor of "life" in connection with Frege may be Frege's statement at the conclusion of his discussion of the errors of the formalists:
- Formal arithmetic can remain alive only by being untrue to itself. Its semblance of life is facilitated by the haste with which mathematicians usually hurry over the foundations of their science (if indeed they have any concern for them), in order to reach more important matters.
- (Frege 1903, pp. 344–5 (p. 137 in original))
- 33 Cf., e.g., *PI* 224–5.
- 34 Compare *PI* 241–2. For more on Wittgenstein's complicated use of the term "criteria" in relation to "forms of life," compare Cavell (1979).

- 35 Dummett puts the issue roughly this way, for instance, at Dummett (1991), pp. 247–8; see also Dummett (1981a), ch. 10 for discussion of the form such a theory might take.
- 36 E.g. *Phaedo* 78e–79b; 103b–104b; *Meno* 75a.

3 “Meaning is use” in the *Tractatus*

- 1 *TLP* 2.18, 2.2ff.
- 2 *TLP* 2.18–2.182.
- 3 *TLP* 2.15. This also explains the somewhat enigmatic 3.1432: “Instead of, ‘The complex sign “aRb” says that a stands to b in the relation R’, we ought to put, ‘That “a” stands to “b” in a certain relation says that aRb.’ Only a fact – never simply a sign – can stand for a fact; if they are to stand for facts, propositions must also *be* facts with an articulated combinatorial structure that is mirrored in the facts they stand for. See also *TLP* 3.14ff.
- 4 *TLP* 3.1431.
- 5 *TLP* 3.143.
- 6 Insofar as standard commentaries express a view about the logically prior conditions for the meaningfulness of simple signs, they typically make some version of the claim that simple signs get their meaning in virtue of an ostensive connection between them and simple objects. But Wittgenstein actually never so much as suggests this account of the meaning of simple signs, and its interpretive ascription to him is deeply misleading.
- 7 Wittgenstein does not generally draw type/token distinctions explicitly. But since, as we shall see, the logically relevant parts of a sentence are defined by sameness of use rather than sameness of orthographic sign, we can take it that signs in a sentence, prior to such definition, are just to be understood as tokens; orthographic sign-types may, then, crosscut symbol-types defined by uses.
- 8 *TLP* 3.32, 3.322, 3.323, 3.326, 3.327. For interesting discussions (which I partially follow here) of the sign/symbol distinction in the broader context of Wittgenstein’s views about meaning and use, see Conant (1998; 2000).
- 9 *TLP* 3.341.
- 10 Significantly, Wittgenstein calls this logically perspicuous notation, following Frege, “concept-writing” or *Begriffsschrift*.
- 11 The problem goes back at least to Stoic theories of the sign. Augustine may have been the first to define the sign explicitly as “something that shows itself to the senses and something other than itself to the mind” (Augustine, 1975, p. 86). But compare also *Cratylus* 434d–435a, where the issue is the power of names to pick out their objects, and Cratylus offers a theory of understanding as grounded in common “usage”:

Socrates: When you say “usage”, do you mean something other than convention? Do you mean something by “usage” besides this: when I utter this name and mean hardness by it, you know that this is what I mean? Isn’t that what you’re saying?

Cratylus: Yes.

Socrates: Even though the name I utter is unlike the thing I mean – since “1” is unlike hardness (to revert to your example). But if that’s right, surely you have entered into a convention with yourself, and the correctness of names has become a matter of convention for you, for isn’t it the chance of usage and convention that makes both like and unlike letters express things?

Wittgenstein discusses the *Cratylus* and its question of the signifying power of names explicitly in Wittgenstein (1933b), p. 35.

- 12 Compare Locke's *Essay*, book III, ch. 10, sections 26–9, where Locke says that words may fail in their purpose “when complex ideas are without names annexed to them”; “when the same sign is not put for the same idea”; and “when words are diverted from their common use”.
- 13 *TLP* 3.33; Wittgenstein reaffirms this, in the context of a describing the rules governing inference, at *TLP* 6.126.
- 14 *TLP* 3.331.
- 15 Anscombe (1959), p. 91.
- 16 Wittgenstein puts it this way in the *Blue Book*, p. 5.
- 17 As developed, for example, in Brandom (1994), ch. 2. In the *Tractatus*, it is true, Wittgenstein did not distinguish between what were subsequently called, following Carnap, *formation rules* and *transformation rules*; nor did he distinguish between *definitional* logical relations among propositions and *inferential* logical relations. For he thought that there is no need for “laws of inference” to justify inferential relations (5.132); what we should call inferential relations among propositions are expressed by these propositions themselves, provided they are written in a symbolism that shows their form (5.13–5.1311).
- 18 *TLP* 3.3; here Wittgenstein endorses Frege's context principle.
- 19 *TLP* 3.31.
- 20 *TLP* 3.317.
- 21 *TLP* 3.315.
- 22 A proposition is completely logically analysed if its grammar is made clear—in no matter what idiom. All that is possible and necessary is to separate what is essential from what is inessential in our language—which amounts to the construction of a phenomenological language. Phenomenology as the grammar of those facts on which physics builds its theories.
(*PR* I, 1, p. 9)
- 23 See, e.g., *PR* 1, para. 9:
- Asked whether philosophers have hitherto spoken nonsense, you could reply: no, they have only failed to notice that they are using a word in quite different senses. In this sense, if we say it's nonsense to say that one thing is as identical as another, this needs qualification, since if anyone says this with conviction, then at that moment he means something by the word “identical” (perhaps “large”), but isn't aware that he is using the word with a different meaning from that in $2 + 2 = 4$.
- 24 *PR*, section 8, para. 82, 84, 85. For a helpful and fascinating discussion of Wittgenstein's route to appreciating this point about systematicity, see Hacker (1996), pp. 78ff.
- 25 See *PR* III.24.
- 26 For the criticism of Russell's view, see *PR* III.21–6; Wittgenstein contrasts it unfavorably with the *Tractatus*' picture theory in III.21, III.25, and III.26. The Russellian theory that Wittgenstein had in mind seems to have been the one in the 1913 manuscript “Theory of Knowledge” (Russell 1913) to which Wittgenstein had, during the period of their initial close interaction, already expressed deep-seated objections.
- 27 *PR* III.21.
- 28 *PR* III.24.
- 29 *PR* III.24.
- 30 Wittgenstein (1934), p. 5
- 31 *PI* 191. Compare Wittgenstein (1933b), p. 116:

So: The word “ball” works only because of the way it is used. But if “understanding the meaning of a word” means knowing its grammatical use (the possibility of its grammatical use) then it can be asked: “How can I know straightaway what I mean by ‘ball?’ After all, I can’t have the complete innage of the use of this word in my head all at once.”

- 32 The relevance of this to the critique of the *Tractatus* is most clear at *PI* 82, where Wittgenstein directly mentions his own earlier conception of language as a calculus:

All this, however, can only appear in the right light when one has attained greater clarity about the concepts of understanding, meaning, and thinking. For it will then also become clear what may lead us (and did lead me) to think that if anyone utters a sentence and *means* or *understands* it he is operating a calculus according to definite rules.

- 33 Compare Wittgenstein (1933b), p. 121, where Wittgenstein expresses doubts about the *Tractatus*’ doctrine of the separable “uses” of words:

For what does it mean when I say that “is” in the sentence “The rose is red” has a different meaning than in “Twice two is four”? If we say that this means that different rules are valid for these two words, then the first thing to say is that we have only *one* word here. But to say that in one case *these* rules are valid for it, and in another, those, is nonsense.

And this is in turn connected with the question of how we can be aware of all the rules when we use a word with a certain meaning, considering that the rules, after all, constitute the meaning?

Part II – Introductory: from syntax to semantics (and pragmatics)

- 1 Hahn *et al.* (1929), p. 157.
- 2 The direct links between the Vienna Circle’s program and the project of a particular kind of modernist, Enlightenment progressivism grounded in the claim that adherence to a scientific method, and the technical developments that result from it, could have profound and revolutionary social consequences is most clear in the writings of Otto Neurath; for a helpful overview, see, for example, Uebel (1996). But it was by no means limited to him; for instance, as Galison (1996) has documented, Carnap’s project in *Der Logische Aufbau der Welt* was both implicitly and explicitly linked to the utopian, progressivist projects of some of the dozens of journals and publications that appeared in Germany between 1919 and 1947 bearing the title “Aufbau” (Neurath himself was deeply involved with one of these journals). The utopianism of the Vienna Circle’s main authors is evident, as well, in the Circle manifesto (Hahn *et al.* 1929), which presented the contrast between the parties to contemporary “social and economic struggles” and linked them to the struggle against metaphysics:

One group of combatants, holding fast to traditional social forms, cultivates traditional attitudes of metaphysics and theology whose content has long since been superseded; while the other group . . . faces modern times, rejects these views and takes its stand on the ground of empirical science.

(p. 157)

For more on the Vienna Circle’s politics, see also Wartofsky (1982).

- 3 See, e.g., Conant (2001).

- 4 Tarski (1933).
- 5 Strictly speaking, because of the apparatus of Gödel numbering, the Gödel sentence for any particular formal system is not *explicitly* self-referential. Nevertheless it can be informally treated as such.
- 6 Tarski (1944), p. 345.
- 7 Thus, the results that Gödel and Tarski derived from the paradoxes of linguistic self-reference demonstrated, for many of the philosophers who followed them, the impossibility of a purely syntactic analysis of language. It was not, at first, so. When Carnap learned of Gödel's result in 1931, his first reaction was not to see it as undermining the project of syntactical analysis that he would announce, in systematic form, in 1934; rather, indeed, he took Gödel's metamathematical technique of arithmetization as supporting it. For Gödel's method of arithmetization, Carnap reasoned, showed how the logical syntax of a language could be formally captured and systematized, and so indeed made the description of arbitrary languages possible. Gödel's paradox, and later Tarski's proof, made it impossible to render a syntactic description of the truth of a language, or show its completeness, *within that language itself*; but in each case, the relevant properties of any language, including truth, were fully capturable within a metalanguage used to describe its formation and transformation rules, provided that the metalanguage used was at least as strong as the object language itself. (for discussion, see Coffa 1991, pp. 303–5).
- 8 Morris (1938).
- 9 Morris (1938), p. 43.
- 10 Morris (1938), p. 59.
- 11 Austin (1955), pp. v–vi.
- 12 Contrary to the most common interpretation of him, Austin therefore did not see the methods of logical positivism as falling prey to the dogma of the primacy of propositional meaning that he most directly opposes. Rather, he cites these methods approvingly, as showing that the work of sentences is more complex than had earlier been thought; his own suggestion of performatives simply continues and develops this discovery (Austin 1955, p. 2).
- 13 Austin (1955), p. 3.
- 14 Austin (1955), p. 5.
- 15 Austin (1955), pp. 14–15.
- 16 Austin (1955), p. 54.
- 17 Austin (1955), p. 67.
- 18 Austin (1955), pp. 61–2.
- 19 Austin (1955), p. 60.
- 20 Austin (1955), pp. 148–9.
- 21 Austin (1955), p. 149.
- 22 Drawing on the “metapragmatics” of Silverstein (1993), Lee (1997) has recently given a far-ranging analysis of the implications of this entanglement for questions of the relationship between the meaning of utterances, their contexts, and accounts of subjectivity.
- 23 Of course, this assumption was, in general, a vast oversimplification. Compare discussion in Chapter 1, above, and Livingston (2004), chs. 2 and 4.
- 24 Ryle (1932).
- 25 Ryle (1938)
- 26 Ryle (1938), p. 287.
- 27 Ryle (1938), p. 283
- 28 Ryle (1949), p. 29; for more discussion see Livingston (2004), pp. 121ff.
- 29 Ryle (1953).
- 30 Ryle (1953), p. 173. For some well placed early doubts about Ryle's conception of meaningfulness as grounded in “rules of use” see Abelson (1957).

- 31 Gellner (1959), p. 32.
 32 For a fascinating discussion of Gellner's book and its (unfortunate) influence, see Uschanov (2002). See also Cavell's roughly contemporary discussion, with reference to the distinctive methods of ordinary language philosophy, in Cavell (1969), ch. 4.

4 Ryle and Sellars on inner-state reports

- 1 Austin (1947); Ryle (1949); Sellars (1955).
 2 Ryle 1949, pp. 29–32.
 3 On a standard misinterpretation of Ryle's project, though, the dispositionalist analyses he suggests of particular mental terms is an analysis of the *referents* of these terms as dispositions or their categorical bases, for instance patterns of behavior or the neurophysiological structures or states of affairs that underlie such patterns in the brain. This construal is a mistake, for Ryle's view of the logic of mental-state terms suggests no such reduction, and he opposes the physicalist's mechanical explanations of mental states as thoroughly as he does the Cartesian's "para-mechanical" explanations (see, for example, pp. 327–30); for more discussion, see Livingston (2004), ch. 4.
 4 Ryle (1949), pp. 119–21.
 5 Ryle (1949), p. 121.
 6 Ryle (1949), pp. 122–3.
 7 Ryle (1949), p. 125.
 8 Ryle (1949), p. 123.
 9 Ryle (1949), p. 141.
 10 Ryle (1949), pp. 217–18.
 11 Ryle (1949), pp. 219–220.
 12 Ryle (1949), pp. 229–30.
 13 This default assumption is recognizable as the semantic core of what is traditionally discussed as epistemic "privileged access" to one's own mental states. For helpful discussion, see for example the essays collected in Gertler (2003), especially chs. 8, 10, 11, and 13.
 14 Sellars (1955), p. 86.
 15 Sellars (1955), p. 87.
 16 Sellars (1955), pp. 87–8.
 17 Sellars (1955), p. 78.
 18 Sellars (1955), p. 74.
 19 Sellars (1955), p. 74–5. Another formulation of the same point is in section 19, p. 44:

Now, it just won't do to reply that to have the concept of green, to know what it is for something to be green, it is sufficient to respond, when one is *in point of fact* in standard conditions, to green objects with the vocable "This is green." Not only must the conditions be of a sort that is appropriate for determining the color of an object by looking, the subject must *know* that conditions of this sort *are* appropriate.

- 20 Sellars (1955), pp. 75–6.
 21 Sellars summarizes Schlick's view, quite accurately, in section 32. Schlick originally expressed it in Schlick (1934) and Schlick (1935).
 22 Sellars (1955), section 34.
 23 Sellars (1955), section 38.
 24 Sellars (1955), section 36.
 25 Sellars (1955), p. 74.

- 26 Brandom (1998) has recently discussed the question of Sellars' relationship to reliabilism.
- 27 Sellars (1955), pp. 73–4.
- 28 Sellars (1955), p. 92.
- 29 Sellars (1955), section 56.
- 30 Sellars (1955), section 57.
- 31 Some of the relevant articles are Sellars (1947a; 1947b; 1948a; 1948b).
- 32 Sellars (1947b), p. 33.
- 33 Sellars (1947b), p. 31.
- 34 The suggestion was influential, in particular, in leading to the “functionalism” of Putnam (1967), Armstrong (1968), and Lewis (1966).
- 35 The discussion unfolds, mostly by dialogue, in sections V and VI of Sellars (1953).
- 36 Sellars' attribution of “logical behaviorism” to Ryle is in fact inaccurate. Ryle was never a behaviorist of any kind (see discussion in Livingston 2004, ch. 4).
- 37 Sellars (1953), pp. 230–4.
- 38 Sellars (1953), pp. 234–5.
- 39 Sellars (1953), p. 235.
- 40 Sellars (1953), p. 236.
- 41 Sellars (1953), p. 237.
- 42 Sellars (1953), p. 237.
- 43 Sellars (1953), p. 245.
- 44 Sellars (1953), p. 244.
- 45 Sellars (1955), pp. 92–3.
- 46 Thomasson (2004) draws a suggestive analogy between Sellars' theory of first-person knowledge in *EPM* and Husserl's method of *epoche* or bracketing to gain access to the contents of first-person experience. Somewhat like Husserl, Thomasson suggests, Sellars can be seen as suggesting that the possibility of identifying first-person contents depends on our ability to bracket or isolate the contents of ordinary observationally or perceptually based judgments. This bracketing, Thomasson suggests, is akin to quotation: it makes the contents themselves available to our reflective consideration of them. The suggestion could perhaps be developed even further in connection with Sellars' earlier account of the semantic knowledge involved in our ability to describe first-person experience.

5 Quine's appeal to use and the genealogy of indeterminacy

- 1 Carnap (1934a), p. 2.
- 2 Carnap (1934a), p. 2.
- 3 Carnap (1934a), p. 284.
- 4 Carnap (1934a), p. 2.
- 5 Carnap (1934a), pp. xiv–xv.
- 6 In 1950, in “Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology,” Carnap would make this even more explicit by introducing the term “linguistic framework” and distinguishing between questions internal and those external to such frameworks. According to this later work, metaphysical questions can universally be treated as external questions about the pragmatic choice of a language framework, rather than as the substantial “internal” questions about the nature of entities or objects that they might otherwise appear to be.
- 7 Carnap (1934a), pp. 286, 301.
- 8 Carnap (1934a), pp. 286, 298.
- 9 Cf. the discussion of Carnap's project in the introductory chapter to Part II above.

- 10 Significantly in view of Quine's later formulation of the radical translation scenario, Carnap's conception of languages in *Syntax* also contains a conception of the translation, or interpretation, of one language in another. For Carnap, a language is interpretable in another language if both can be formulated as sub-languages of a third whose syntactical rules correlate sentences in the first with sentences in the second as equivalent in meaning (Carnap (1934a), p. 229).
- 11 It is true that Carnap stops short of *identifying* languages with calculi; in addition to their purely formal aspects, he holds, languages also have semantic and pragmatic aspects that are not accessible to the study of pure syntax (Carnap (1934a), p. 5). But it is essential to his conception in *Syntax* that a purely formal treatment of a language can expose the rules of grammatical formation and derivation that are responsible for a language's signs having the meanings that they do, and so that any language can, for the purposes of logical syntax, indeed be treated as a pure, otherwise uninterpreted calculus.
- 12 Carnap (1934a), p. xv.
- 13 Carnap (1934a), p. xiii.
- 14 At one point in *Syntax*, Carnap seems to admit this. On page 228, while discussing the possibility of translation of one language into another, he writes:

We have already seen that, in the case of an individual language like German, the construction of the syntax of that language means the construction of a calculus which fulfils the condition of being in agreement with the actual historical habits of speech of German-speaking people.

- But the reference to what has already been seen is obscure. In any case, Carnap evidently considers this restriction unimportant, to be used only in making the decision whether a given calculus adequately captures an existing natural language, rather than in the derivation of the calculus itself.
- 15 A closely related problem for Carnap's logical syntax project is the problem of the "name of the name" already pointed out by K. Reach in 1938 (Reach (1938)). Carnap had held that it is possible for logical syntax to speak of the *names* of a language through the ordinary device of quotation; for instance, if I wish to talk about Smith's name, I simply employ the ordinarily tacit convention by means of which "'Smith'" can serve as a name for the name "Smith". In answer to the question "What does "'Smith'" mean?" I can then answer: "'Smith'" (i.e. the name for Smith). But as Reach pointed out (p. 99) the answer cannot be informative; for it presupposes that I already understand the tacit convention of naming names by quoting them. If the hearer already knows this convention, the answer is not informative; but if I do *not* use this convention it will again be impossible to informatively answer the question since the listener will not understand the response. (Cf., also, Anscombe's discussion (1957, pp. 51–2)). It follows that there is in general no way to formulate, within a language, an informative description of what is said in that language when a name is named. (Reach 1938, p. 109). Agamben (1990, pp. 69ff.) has also discussed the more general implications of this problem for the question of linguistic self-reference.
- 16 Quine (1934b), p. 61
- 17 Quine (1934b), p. 60.
- 18 Quine (1934a), pp. 49–50.
- 19 Quine (1934a), p. 50.
- 20 Quine (1935), p. 73.
- 21 Carroll (1895).
- 22 Quine (1935), p. 97.
- 23 Quine (1935), pp. 98–9.

- 24 Following the publication of “Truth by Convention,” Quine’s incipient doubts about analyticity and related issues developed during some correspondence with Carnap about intensionality in 1938 (Quine and Carnap 1990, p. 240) and, more importantly, in discussions with Carnap and Tarski in 1940–41. But it was not until 1947 that Quine developed the argument against analyticity explicitly, largely in correspondence with Nelson Goodman and Morton White. For a helpful review of this history, see Isaacson 2003, pp. 233–5.
- 25 One reason for its notoriety is that it has been considered to represent a turning point in the methods of analytic philosophy. For Quine’s rejection of the analytic/synthetic distinction seemed, especially in conjunction with the semantic holism and epistemological naturalism that he already recommended in that article, to demand the abandonment of any conception of philosophy as consisting purely in the logical or conceptual *analysis* of the structure of language. Instead, on at least one widespread conception, the philosophical investigation of meaning after “Two Dogmas” becomes continuous with natural science, to be construed behavioristically as the analysis of the actual speech dispositions of speakers in a given community. This story is, at best, a caricature of what is in fact a much more complicated historical development from the initial methods of Russellian or Wittgensteinian “analysis,” through the structuralist projects characteristic of logical positivism, and toward the more broadly based and eclectic forms of “ordinary language” analysis and reflection that were beginning to be practiced, as Quine was writing, at Oxford. Few of these forms of analysis and reflection require anything like the analytic/synthetic distinction that Quine criticizes in Carnap, and its repudiation does not at all require that philosophical reflection on language become partly or wholly “empirical.” The usual historical story gives an implausible picture, as well, of Quine’s own development. As we have seen, the repudiation of Carnap’s analytic/synthetic distinction was essentially complete by 1934; it was only much later that Quine would set it within the context of the naturalist view of epistemology that he drew from Neurath and the behaviorism that he drew from Skinner.
- 26 Quine (1950), p. 33.
- 27 Quine (1950), p. 24.
- 28 Quine (1954), pp. 119–20.
- 29 Carnap (1938), p. 169.
- 30 Carnap (1963), p. 919.
- 31 See also Ricketts (2003).
- 32 Ebbs (1997), pp. 105–7.
- 33 Ebbs (1997), p. 98.
- 34 It would hold equally, for instance, against any view according to which the practice of a language is determined by rules thought to be represented explicitly (not in the social practice of a language but) in the brain or mind of an individual speaker; for these rules, too, there would be an open question about the source of their interpretation and their justificatory application.
- 35 Quine (1960), p. 28.
- 36 Quine (1960), p. 71.
- 37 Quine (1960), pp. 29–30.
- 38 Quine (1960), p. 27.
- 39 See, e.g., Quine (1960), p. 28.
- 40 For another argument to the effect that the indeterminacy result does not depend in any deep way on behaviorism, see Harman (1969). There is a large literature about the implications of Quine’s particular way of restricting, and describing, the facts available to the radical interpreter, which is sometimes described as “verificationist” in origin. See, for example, Rorty (1972) and Kirk (2003). In arguing that Quine’s indeterminacy result does not depend essentially

on his behaviorism, I do not mean to deny that his avowed behaviorism played an important role in leading him to arrive at the result, and continues to play a role in the way that he states it. Nor do I mean to deny that the indeterminacy result itself played an important role in his move toward naturalism and naturalized epistemology. The claim is just that the indeterminacy result does not itself require, at the outset, any restriction to facts about behavior or facts about dispositions to behavior. The operative restriction is, rather, to all of those facts about the practice of a language that may be considered to be available independently of an interpretation of that language; and this does not require any particular further characterization of the form or subject matter of those facts.

- 41 There is a substantial literature debating the extent to which the indeterminacy result differs from, or is similar to, Quine's independent thesis of the underdetermination of theory by evidence in scientific theorizing generally. See, for example, Gibson (1986). In Quine's responses to this literature, he clarifies that the two results are genuinely different: whereas a scientific theory may be underdetermined by all actually available evidence, yet still be considered to embody facts, a translation manual outstrips all the actual or even *possible* facts of the matter. (See, for example, Quine 1986a).
- 42 The point is significant, as well, in that it affects the status and scope of the indeterminacy result itself. For decades after Quine's formulation of indeterminacy, commentators repeatedly attempted to respond to it by suggesting that the introduction of further facts, perhaps about the neurophysiological constitution of the brain, could suffice to reduce or eliminate the scope of translational indeterminacy by narrowing the space of possible interpretations of a language or demanding a single, unique one. As Quine repeatedly pointed out in response, however, no such introduction of further facts affects the indeterminacy result. (See, for example, Quine (1979) and Quine (1986b), where he says directly that "even a full understanding of neurology would in no way resolve the indeterminacy of translation" (p. 365).) For the radical translation scenario is already formulated to include, in the evidentiary base antecedently accessible to an interpreter, *any and all* facts (of whatever kind) that such an interpreter could, in principle, antecedently observe. There is no bar, explicit or implied, to facts (for instance) about neurology, nor to any fact about the social practice of language that is evident in observable linguistic or non-linguistic behavior.
- 43 Quine (1960), p. 68.
- 44 Quine's example of this is the rabbit-fly that the native uses to recognize the presence of a rabbit; given the collateral information that rabbit-flies are reliable indicators of the presence of rabbits, information which the translator lacks, the native will assent to "Gavagai" under different conditions than those under which the translator will assent to "rabbit," necessitating an interpretive decision undetermined by the observable facts. (Quine (1960), p. 37).
- 45 Quine (1960), pp. 51–3.
- 46 Quine (1960), pp. 51–2.
- 47 Quine (1969b), p. 46; see the helpful discussion of this in Hookway 1988, pp. 141–2.
- 48 This is obscured, according to Quine, by the fact that in understanding our compatriots, we ordinarily translate "automatically" or homophonically, associating token sentences in our compatriots' mouths with the like-sounding sentences for us. But this does not eliminate the systematic sources of indeterminacy, as for instance when we must trade off between taking a friend's utterances to be false, and taking him to be using the same words with a different meaning (p. 59); indeed, it would be possible (though perverse) to use a non-homophonic translation manual, while still preserving all the facts about linguistic usage (p. 78).

- 49 Quine (1960), p. 26.
- 50 See, for example, Alston (1986) and Ebbs (1997), both of whom appeal to versions of the thought that being a master of a language must qualify a speaker to know the meanings of her own sentences; for a similar thought, expressed in terms of intuitions about the “supervenience” of “facts about meaning” on natural facts, see Soames 2003, p. 251. Along similar lines, Hacker (1996) argues that what the radical translator, in Quine’s scenario, interprets is not even a *language* at all, since languages are not only factual structures but include an essential dimension of normativity. But as Kirk (2003) responds, Quine’s thesis can also naturally be posed as a question about the *relationship* between facts and norms of linguistic behavior, without prejudicing the question of what is the object of translation.
- 51 Alston’s (1986) statement of this is typical:

Clearly . . . it seems obvious that I know what I mean by “rabbit” and other words in my language. I know that, e.g., I use “rabbit” to denote complete enduring organisms like that, rather than the parts or stages of such organisms or the kinds to which they belong. My assurance as to what I mean by “rabbit” does not rest on what I or anyone else is able to do in translating one language into another, much less on what is possible by way of radical translation. Even if everything Quine says about that were correct, I would still know what “rabbit” means in my language. I know this just by virtue of being a master of my language. Knowing this is an essential part of what it is to have that language; knowing this is required for being able to use that language as a vehicle of thought and means of communication.

(pp. 59–60)

- 52 Nevertheless, it may break down at any point as well.
- 53 In chapter 6 of *Word and Object*, Quine argues for the systematic eliminability of *posited entities* such as “propositions” and “sentence meanings” from a regimented analysis of natural language; it is unclear whether he thinks reflection on the systematic basis of what we intuitively grasp as “linguistic meaning” is similarly eliminable.
- 54 Quine (1960), ch. 5.
- 55 Quine (1969a).

Part III – Introductory: from the aporia of structure to the critique of practice

- 1 It is an interesting, and remarkable, fact of ordinary discourse that the question “what does *that* mean?” can ask after both what words mean and what people mean “by them”; the first asks after something like a dictionary definition; the other (and herein lies its significance) asks after something else which, although not independent of definitions, is not exhausted by them. Compare Cavell (1979), pp. 207ff).
- 2 Kant (1789), A vii.
- 3 *TLP* 4.0031.
- 4 The book deals with the problems of philosophy and shows, as I believe, that the posing of these problems rests on the misunderstanding of the logic of our language . . . The book will, therefore, draw a limit to thinking, or rather—not to thinking, but to the expression of thoughts; for, in order to draw a limit to thinking we should have to think both sides of this limit (we should therefore have to be able to think what cannot be thought). . . . [T]he truth of the thoughts communicated seems to me unassailable and definitive. I am, therefore, of the opinion, that the problems in their essentials have finally been

solved. And if I am not mistaken in this, then the value of this work secondly consists in that it shows how little has been done when these problems have been solved.

(*TLP*, preface, 4–5; I modify the Ogden translation slightly in a couple of places.)

The preface bears comparison to the preface of the first edition of Kant's first *Critique*:

It is a call to reason to undertake anew the most difficult of all its tasks, namely that of self-knowledge, and to institute a tribunal which will assure to reason its lawful claims, and dismiss all groundless pretensions, not by despotic decrees, but in accordance with its own eternal and unalterable laws. This tribunal is no other than the *Critique of Pure Reason* . . . I have entered upon this path—the only one that has remained unexplored—and flatter myself that in following it I have found a way of guarding against all those errors which have hitherto set reason, in its non-empirical employment, at variance with itself. I have not evaded its questions by pleading the insufficiency of human reason. On the contrary, I have specified these questions exhaustively, according to principles; and after locating the point at which, through misunderstanding, reason comes into conflict with itself, I have solved them to its complete satisfaction . . . In this enquiry I have made completeness my chief aim, and I venture to assert that there is not a single metaphysical problem which has not been solved, or for the solution of which the key at least has not been supplied.

(Axi–Axiiii)

- 5 *PI* 201; I modify Anscombe's translation slightly to bring out the sense of Wittgenstein's German more clearly.
- 6 More specifically, this is the question of the power of reason to *motivate*, which Kant treats in terms of our capacity to recognize its force. But part of Wittgenstein's point is that if there is a problem of force here, there is just as much a problem of the conditions for the possibility of recognizing it.
- 7 *PI* 217.
- 8 Cavell (1979), p. 175. Compare Cavell 2005, ch. 8, and Cavell (1989) "Declining Decline," where Cavell characterizes the *Philosophical Investigations* as containing a kind of "philosophy of culture":

Wittgenstein's appeal or "approach" to the everyday finds the (actual) everyday to be as pervasive a scene of illusion and trance and artificiality (of need) as Plato or Rousseau or Marx or Thoreau had found. His philosophy of the (eventual) everyday is the proposal of a practice that takes on, takes upon itself, precisely (I do not say exclusively) that scene of illusion and of loss; approaches it, or let me say reproaches it, intimately enough to turn it, or deliver it; as if the actual is the womb, contains the terms, of the eventual.
(p. 46)

See also Cavell's recent discussion of "The *Investigations*' Everyday Aesthetics of Itself" (Cavell 2004).

- 9 Cf. von Wright (1993), who describes the history of modern logic, in the analytic tradition, "as a process of 'rational disenchantment'" (p. 19) and indeed situates the entirety of the tradition, as well as its legacy for the future, within the extended development of enlightenment modes of disenchantment and demystification (e.g. p. 50).

- 10 “Language (or thought) is something unique—this proves to be a superstition (not a mistake!) itself produced by grammatical illusions.” (*PI* 110). Cf. what Wittgenstein says in reference to behaviorism at *PI* 307: “‘Are you not really a behaviourist in disguise? Aren’t you at bottom really saying that everything except human behaviour is a fiction?’—If I do speak of a fiction, then it is of a *grammatical* fiction.”
- 11 In particular, one might say, psychologism presents language as ultimately under the control of thought, and thus as secondary and inessential to the content that is lodged in the privileged interiority of a subject wholly intelligible to itself. This picture of agency and mastery presents linguistic meaning as if it depended wholly and only on the decisions or experiences of such subjects, as if its determination and the play of its significance did not depend inescapably on the forms of our mutuality as well, on the ways that, in intersubjective discourse, words are risked or ventured, their significance discovered or lost.
- 12 E.g. Dummett (1994).
- 13 Hylton (1990) gives a fascinating account of this rebellion.
- 14 Heidegger (1929); Carnap (1932a). For interesting commentary, see Friedman (2000).
- 15 E.g. McCumber (2001).
- 16 One such incident was the polemic between Schlick and Husserl over the analysis of experience (see Livingston 2004, ch. 2, for discussion).
- 17 See, for instance, John Searle’s (1977) notorious and scathing critical response to Derrida’s discussion of Austin in “Signature, Event, Context.” The polemic between Searle and Derrida about the reception of Austin has unfortunately represented, for several decades, the most prominent and visible encounter between deconstruction and the analytic legacy of speech act theory. Derrida’s side of the polemic, including a long response to Searle, is reprinted in *Limited Inc.* Cavell has discussed the question of Austin’s reception helpfully in Cavell (1969), ch. 4 and, with reference to the Searle-Derrida polemic, Cavell (1994).

6 Wittgenstein, Kant, and the critique of totality

- 1 *Gebrauch* or “use” in this sense ought to be distinguished from cognates like *Benutzung* (“employment”), which Wittgenstein uses generally to occurrences of words in the speaking of a language, and *Anwendung* or “application,” which Wittgenstein uses most often in reference to the use of a word or a rule in a *new* case. Section 43 of the *Philosophical Investigations*, the section that is most often cited to support the usual interpretation of Wittgenstein as holding a “use-theory” of meaning, in fact turns in large part on these distinctions, holding that “for a large class of cases” of the employment (*Benutzung*) of the word “meaning,” this word, namely “meaning” can be explained (*erklären*) by saying that the “meaning” of a word is its use (*Gebrauch*) in the language.
- 2 A 302/B 359. Unless otherwise noted, citations in this chapter are to Kant (1789).
- 3 A 305/B 361.
- 4 Thus the pure concepts of reason, now under consideration, are *transcendental ideas*. They are concepts of pure reason, in that they view all knowledge gained in experience as being determined through an absolute totality of conditions. They are not arbitrarily invented; they are imposed by the very nature of reason itself, and therefore stand in necessary relation to the whole employment of understanding. Finally, they are transcendent and overstep the limits of all experience; no object adequate to the transcendental idea can ever be found within experience.

- 5 A 322/B 378–9.
 6 A 323/B 379.
 7 Sallis 1980, pp. 154–5.
 8 Adorno 1959, p. 66.
 9 Adorno 1966, p. 5.
- 10 [Wittgenstein's] philosophy was a critique of language very similar in scope and purpose to Kant's critique of thought. Like Kant, he believed that philosophers often unwittingly stray beyond the limits into the kind of specious nonsense that seems to express genuine thoughts but in fact does not do so. He wanted to discover the exact location of the line dividing sense from nonsense, so that people might realize when they had reached it and stop. This is the negative side of his philosophy and it makes the first, and usually the deepest, impression on his readers. But it also has another, more positive side. His purpose was not merely to formulate instructions which would save people from trying to say what cannot be said in language, but also to succeed in understanding the structure of what can be said. He believed that the only way to achieve this understanding is to plot the limits, because the limits and the structure have a common origin. The nature of language dictates both what you can and what you cannot do with it.
 (Pears 1970, pp. 2–3)
- 11 For example, Gellner (1959). Philosophers within the tradition of critical theory have also sometimes rejected Wittgenstein's thought as fundamentally conservative in its supposed limitation of philosophical criticism to the standard of "ordinary use"; see for example Marcuse (1964).
- 12 See for example Nyiri (1981).
- 13 Thus, Winch (1958) argues on what he takes to be Wittgensteinian grounds against projects in anthropology and social science that attempt to interrogate social practices "from without," holding that the only way appropriately to practice social science is reflexively, from within the very practices that are investigated. The position is similar, as well, to that of Apel (1972, ch. 1), who takes "language-games" to be structured preconditions of possible understanding, holding that "the understanding of meaning always presupposes participation in the language-game, through whose context the meaning structure of a situation is revealed a priori." (p. 31). For an instructive criticism of Winch's position, see Pitkin (1972), pp. 254–63.
- 14 In particular, the usual interpretation of the Kantian element in Wittgenstein is continuous with a long-standing tendency, within the analytic tradition's interpretations of Kant, to emphasize the limit-fixing project of the *Transcendental Analytic* over that of the dialectical one of the *Dialectic*. The tendency may have its origin in Strawson (1966). For a helpful criticism of it, see Neiman (2000).
- 15 Crary (2000), p. 119.
 16 Crary (2000), p. 138.
 17 Along similar lines, Cerbone (2003) argues that we should resist the temptation to interpret Wittgenstein as holding any view according to which "'our form of life' serves as a boundary, a set of constraints, in short a limit, 'within' which our concepts can be legitimately applied" (p. 44). The thought that such limits could be described is itself, Cerbone argues, one of Wittgenstein's favored critical targets. Like Crary, Cerbone suggests that the deepest object of Wittgenstein's criticism is in fact the illusion of a position from which we could draw a stable line between sense and nonsense within our language as a whole. Indeed, the effect of this criticism, if it is successful, is to remove any grounds for either a "relativistic" or an "absolutist" account of the dependence of language on our language-games or practices; for if there are indeed no grounds within Wittgenstein's

methods for assuming meanings to be “fixed” either within language-games or in a way transcendent to them, then there is no way to employ these methods to support either a relativist or an absolutist theory of this fixation.

18 Diamond (1991), pp. 155–6.

19 See for example Ostrow (2001):

My contention . . . is that the Wittgensteinian view of the nature of his own claims, of philosophy generally, . . . is contained in the seeing how our philosophical assertions change their character, how they undermine their own initial presentation as straightforward truth claims . . . In different terms, what this discussion helps to make evident is the fundamentally dialectical nature of Wittgenstein’s thought in the *Tractatus*. It brings to the fore the extent to which we are, at every juncture of the book, engaged with the very metaphysics that is apparently being disparaged.

(p. 12)

20 It is as if we could grasp the whole use of the word in a flash. Like *what* e.g.?—Can’t the use—in a certain sense—be grasped in a flash? And in what sense can it not?—The point is, that it is as if we could “grasp it in a flash” in yet another and much more direct sense than that.—But have you a model for this? No. It is just that this expression suggests itself to us. As the result of the crossing of different pictures.

(PI 191)

21 PI 11.

22 PI 3, 4.

23 PI 4.

24 PI 13, PI 22.

25 It is interesting to compare the multiplicity of the tools in language and of the ways they are used, the multiplicity of kinds of words and sentence, with what logicians have said about the structure of language. (Including the author of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*).

(PI 23)

26 PI 117.

27 PI 102.

28 PI 103, 107.

29 When someone says the word “cube” to me, for example, I know what it means. But can the whole use of the word come before my mind, when I understand it in this way?

Well, but on the other hand isn’t the meaning of the word also determined by this use? And can’t these ways of determining meaning conflict? Can what we grasp in a flash accord with a use, fit or fail to fit it? And how can what is present to us in an instant, what comes before our mind in an instant, fit a use?

(PI 139).

30 PI 195.

31 Wittgenstein (1984).

32 Thus Cavell (1989) has read Wittgenstein as a “philosopher of culture” in that he gives, in the *Investigations*, something like a critical “portrait of a complete sophisticated culture” (p. 74). Cf. also the instructive analysis given by Pitkin (1972) of some of the implications of Wittgenstein’s thought for questions of justice, power, and the nature of action.

- 33 For example Carnap (1928); see next chapter.
- 34 Recently, some commentators have begun to explore the possibility of reading Wittgenstein in a way that shows the relevance of his commentary to Marxist critique. Andrews (2002), for instance, argues that Marx's description of the origin of value in *Capital* can be read, in Wittgensteinian terms, as a critical description of the "language-game" of value in bourgeois society. Along similar lines, Rossi-Lundi (2002) suggests that the forms of philosophical language that Wittgenstein criticizes as "language on a holiday" can be read, within a Marxist critical register, as "alienated" forms of linguistic praxis. Pleasants (1999) argues on Wittgensteinian grounds against the very idea of a "critical social theory." As Pleasants argues, Wittgenstein in fact submits the idea of a theory of social practice to devastating critique. This significantly problematizes the kind of use that contemporary critical theorists, for instance Habermas (1981), have sought to make of what they take to be Wittgenstein's theory of language. But it leaves open the possibility of an entirely critical, practical, and *non-theoretical* application of reflection on language to contemporary political and social problems, a prospect that is much more reminiscent of the work of Adorno, Horkheimer, and other members of the early Frankfurt School.
- 35 See also Horkheimer and Adorno (1944).
- 36 Robert Pippin (2005, ch. 5) has recently criticized the position of Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* on the basis that Adorno's notion of "identity thinking" is too broad to serve as a useful term for the critique of prevalent social practices and norms, and that Adorno's critique of Kant accordingly misunderstands the specificity of Kant's notion of practical reason. One of Pippin's complaints is that the recommendation to avoid "identity thinking" can only amount to a recommendation to remember the essential "inadequacy" of general concepts to the particulars that fall under them (Pippin 2005, p. 105). If I am right, however, reading Wittgenstein's critique of rule-following as also involving a critique of what Adorno calls "identity thinking" might indeed give us grounds for questioning what is involved in "applying concepts" in ordinary cases that do not simply amount to this kind of supplementation to (what is supposed to be) the ordinary operation of subsuming particulars under concepts.
- 37 Cavell (1979, p. 175) gives an apt description of the form of this self-critique:

If philosophy is the criticism a culture produces of itself, and proceeds essentially by criticizing past efforts at this criticism, then Wittgenstein's originality lies in having developed modes of criticism that are not moralistic, that is, that do not leave the critic imagining himself free of the faults he sees around him, and which proceed not by trying to argue a given statement false or wrong, but by showing that the person making an assertion does not really know what he means, has not really said what he wished.

7 Thinking and being

- 1 Pippin (2005, ch. 3) has recently given a helpful account of Heidegger's description of the structure of Dasein in *Being and Time*, as well, as determined by the possibility of a withdrawal or failure of "meaning."
- 2 For example, section 34: "Discourse is existentially equiprimordial with attunement and understanding." (Heidegger 1927, p. 161)
- 3 Heidegger 1927, section 34, p. 166. I modify the Stambaugh translation in a couple of places to bring out the sense of the original more clearly.
- 4 Recognizing the ontologically insufficient interpretation of the *logos* at the same time sharpens our insight into the lack of primordially of the methodical basis

on which ancient ontology developed. The logos is experienced as something objectively present and interpreted as such, and the beings which it points out have the meaning of objective presence as well. This meaning of being itself is left undifferentiated and unconstrasted with other possibilities of being so that being in the sense of a formal being-something is at the same time fused with it and we are unable to obtain a clear-cut division between these two realms.

(Heidegger 1927, p. 160)

- 5 "Presence" is meant here in both a temporal and a non-temporal sense.
- 6 Heidegger 1938a, p. 3.
- 7 I follow the practice of the English-language translators in translating *Seyn* as "Be-ing."
- 8 "This saying does not describe or explain, does not proclaim or teach. This saying does not stand over against what is said. Rather, the saying itself is the 'to be said,' as the essential swaying of be-ing." (Heidegger 1938a, p. 4)
- 9 Heidegger (1938a), p. 54.
- 10 Heidegger (1938a), p. 26.
- 11 This point about language's failure remains constant throughout Heidegger's treatments of language and its being. Consider, for example, his statement of it in "The Nature of Language" in 1957:

There is some evidence that the essential nature of language flatly refuses to express itself in words—in the language, that is, in which we make statements about language. If language everywhere withholds its nature in this sense, then such withholding is in the very nature of language.

(Heidegger 1957a, p. 81)

- 12 Thus, in section 34 of *Being and Time*, keeping silent (*Schweigen*) and hearing are described as possibilities of discourse (*Rede*), which is itself equiprimordial with "state-of-mind" and "understanding" as constituents of the existential structure of "Being-in" as such. There is no suggestion that the possibility of "keeping silent" has any essential privilege over other existential structures of discourse; nor, indeed, that discourse itself has any privilege over the other structures essential for Being-in. Even in these descriptions, however, what is disclosed in reticence is not connected in any significant way to a general failure of language; nor is it explained as indicating anything decisive about the general character of language itself. Instead, the emphasis throughout *Being and Time* remains on the way that the possibility of an individual's reticence implies also that she "has something to say," and so defines herself as someone "with" a conscience. Insofar as an individual *Da-sein* can practice "reticence" in this sense, she "takes the words away" from the fallenness of "idle talk."
- 13 See, especially, "The Nature of Language" (Heidegger 1957a), and for an exceptionally clear reading of the implications of "words failing one" in this lecture, see Bernasconi (1985), especially ch. 4. Cf. also Heidegger (1929).
- 14 Heidegger (1938a), p. 58.
- 15 As Heidegger uses it, the term *die Seienden* can be translated "beings" or "entities." Entities are whatever has any kind of existence: things and objects, but also properties, acts, and events.
- 16 In colloquial German, "Machenschaft" refers, like the English word "machination," to calculating and technical ways of making and doing; but we should also keep in mind the etymological connection between "Machenschaft" and "Macht" or power, as well as the corresponding resonances of Heidegger's critique of machination with his critical consideration of Nietzsche's "will to power" (*Wille zur Macht*).

- 17 Heidegger 1938a, section 50.
- 18 But the second beginning is by no means just like the first beginning in its fundamental character and attitude. Whereas the first beginning was “attuned” toward wonder and the questioning contemplation of beings, the second beginning is attuned toward “foreboding” and opens the question of the truth of being itself (Heidegger 1938a, section 6).
- 19 The character of machination is thus deeply ambiguous; machination comes to the fore as an aspect of the absence and withdrawal of being, but nevertheless does so as an expression or aspect of being itself, and therefore harbors within itself the possibility of giving us a new understanding of it. This notion of the twofold or ambiguous nature of technology is a familiar theme of Heidegger’s later writings about technology. See, for example, “The Question Concerning Technology” (Heidegger 1953).
- 20 Heidegger 1938a, section 58.
- 21 Heidegger (1938a), pp. 89–90.
- 22 See, for example, Dilthey (1931).
- 23 Heidegger 1927, p. 44.
- 24 For an interesting analysis of the influence of *Lebensphilosophie* in phenomenology and in relation to Wittgenstein’s thought, see Gier (1981), especially ch. 3.
- 25 Heidegger 1938a, section 66.
- 26 Heidegger 1938a, section 63.
- 27 Heidegger (1953).
- 28 Heidegger (1938b), pp. 153–5.
- 29 Heidegger (1938b), p. 155.
- 30 There was a time when it was not technology alone that bore the name *techne*. Once the revealing that brings forth truth into the splendour of radiant appearance was also called *techne*.
There was a time when the bringing-forth of the true into the beautiful was called *techne*. The *poiesis* of the fine arts was also called *techne*.
(Heidegger 1953, p. 339)
- 31 Heidegger (1938b), p. 155.
- 32 Heidegger (1938b), p. 155.
- 33 Heidegger (1938a), section 61.
- 34 Heidegger (1952), p. 244.
- 35 Heidegger (1952), p. 241.
- 36 Heidegger (1957b), p. 25.
- 37 Compare also the largely parallel discussion in Heidegger (1954), pp. 81–3.
- 38 Heidegger (1957b), pp. 25–6.
- 39 Wittgenstein (1930), p. 7.
- 40 Carnap (1928), pp. xvi–xvii. I owe this juxtaposition of the Carnap and Wittgenstein quotations, as well as the suggestion that Wittgenstein may have had Carnap in mind, to von Wright (1993, pp. 208–9). For more on the deep linkages between the attitude expressed by Carnap and contemporary versions of utopian and progressivist thought, including the architectural modernism of the Bauhaus architects, see Galison (1996).
- 41 Carnap (1928), p. 29.
- 42 Of course, Carnap’s underlying motivation is not to portray a picture of subjectivity but rather to eliminate it from the structural description of the “objective” world; it is for this reason that the description of objective statements as grounded structurally in basic experiential units or “erlebs” will itself soon drop out of Carnap’s picture. Following the suggestions of recent scholarship (e.g. Friedman 2000) we might think of the projects of Carnap and Heidegger as—particularly with respect to their shared animadversity to metaphysics—striking

ingly convergent in their underlying critical motivations but strikingly (and decisively) divergent in the ways they sought to carry them out.

43 *PI* 23.

44 The connection is evident in the only known remark by Wittgenstein about Heidegger, from 30 December 1929, which begins:

I can readily think what Heidegger means by Being and Dread [*Angst*]. Man has the impulse to run up against the limits of language. Think, for example, of the astonishment that anything exists. This astonishment cannot be expressed in the form of a question, and there is also no answer to it. Everything which we feel like saying can, a priori, only be nonsense. Nevertheless, we do run up against the limits of language. This running-up against Kierkegaard also recognized and even designated it in a quite similar way (as running-up against Paradox).

The remark is translated in Murray (1978, p. 80); an earlier translation appeared, without the title “Zu Heidegger” and the first and last sentences, at the end of Wittgenstein (1933c); see also Murray (1974).

45 *TLP* 5.6, 6.45.

46 *TLP* 6.522.

47 *TLP* 7.

48 Compare Heidegger (1957a):

There is some evidence that the essential nature of language flatly refuses to express itself in words—in the language, that is, in which we make statements about language. If language everywhere withholds its nature in this sense, then such withholding is in the very nature of language.

(p. 81)

49 Cf. also *PI* 34, where an interlocutor is presented as holding that “I always do the same thing when I attend to a shape: my eye follows the outline and I feel.”

50 In a footnote to his now-classic discussion of Wittgenstein’s rule-following paradox, Kripke (1982, pp. 18–19) discusses the question of whether the paradox might be construed as an attack on some notion of “absolute” identity and thereby resolved by some concept of identity as “relative,” for instance that described by Geach (1980). As he says, this resolution cannot work, since no standard of identity, even a “relative” one, suffices by itself to establish that my way of following a rule can indeed always be seen as grounded in its repetition.

51 *PI* 218.

52 *PI* 201.

53 Wittgenstein has sometimes been taken to be criticizing the language of metaphysics by supposing it possible to return to a more innocent “ordinary language” in which metaphysical confusions “cannot arise.” Such an impression of Wittgenstein’s sense of the origination of philosophical problems is, as we have seen repeatedly, quite superficial. The temptations to error and confusion that reach their fullest expression in the projects of philosophers are, for Wittgenstein, already present in the ordinary forms of language themselves and in our standing tendencies to mistake them.

54 Some recent discussions that connect Heidegger with Wittgenstein are: Apel (1998, ch. 6), Rorty (1993), and Guignon (1990).

55 Versions of the “social pragmatist” interpretation of Heidegger are given by Haugeland (1982), Brandom (1983), and Rorty (1993). The further development of this interpretation has also been influenced by Dreyfus’ (1990) analysis of the first division of *Being and Time*.

8 Language, norms, and the force of reason

- 1 Some prominent examples of projects that make this appeal, in one way or another, include: Brandom (1994), Rorty (1979), Kripke (1982), and Davidson (2001).
- 2 These historical readings are spelled out, in more detail, in Brandom (2002).
- 3 Brandom (1994), p. 20.
- 4 Brandom (1994), p. 11.
- 5 Brandom (1994), p. 32.
- 6 For another representative example of this kind of appeal, see for example Robert Pippin's (2005) description of the significance of norms in the course of his recent attempt to rehabilitate a Hegelian conception of freedom and subjectivity:

Genuinely leading a life is rightly taken to involve the problem of freedom, and in the Kantian/Hegelian tradition I am interested in, freedom means being able somehow to own up to, justify, and stand behind one's deeds (reclaim them as my own), and that involves (so it is argued) understanding what it is to be responsive to norms, reasons.

(p. 11)

- 7 Brandom (1994), pp. 19–20.
- 8 Brandom (1994), p. 628.
- 9 Brandom (1994), p. 20.
- 10 Brandom (1994), p. 20.
- 11 In the *Tractatus*, at 4.002, Wittgenstein does speak of “tacit conventions” underlying the use of everyday language; but the claim that language use depends on conventions in this sense is, as I have argued, a direct target of the later Wittgenstein's criticism of his earlier position. Compare, also, the somewhat fuller discussion of Ramsey's remark in the *Big Typescript* (Wittgenstein 1933b), pp. 198ff.
- 12 Cf. *PI* 60–3, where Wittgenstein critically discusses the prospects for an analysis of orders, and *PI* 133.
- 13 Brandom (1994), p. 34.
- 14 Brandom (1994), p. 36.
- 15 Brandom (1994), p. 39.
- 16 The challenge is to show how these two approaches (normative pragmatics modeled on deontic scorekeeping and inferential semantics) can be combined into a single story about social practices of treating speech acts as having the significance of assertions . . . Describing practices sufficient to institute such a significance is the way to fill in the notion of assertional commitment. Such an account provides an answer to the question, What is it that we are *doing* when we assert, claim, or declare something? The general answer is that we are undertaking a certain kind of *commitment*. Saying specifically *what* kind is explaining what structure must be exhibited by the practices a community is interpreted as engaging in for that interpretation to be recognizable as taking the practitioners to be keeping score for themselves and each other in virtue of the alterations of their practical deontic attitudes of attributing and undertaking assertional commitments and their corresponding entitlements.

(Brandom (1994), p. 167)
- 17 Brandom follows Sellars in speaking of these “inferential norms,” in an extended sense, as determining the complex “roles” that “expressions . . . play in the

- behavioral economy of those to whom they are attributed.” (Brandom (1994), p. 134).
- 18 Some support for the latter interpretation is apparently given by *PI* 25, 415, and perhaps 206; but for a different and much more subtle view of what might be meant by Wittgenstein’s “naturalism”, see Cavell 1979, ch. 5.
- 19 The word that Anscombe translates as “abolish” can also mean “sublate.”
- 20 For these doubts, see *PI* 126–32.
- 21 *PI* 224–5.
- 22 *PI* 228. Thus it cannot be the point of Wittgenstein’s discussion to (as Habermas 1981, pp. 17–18, suggests) provide grounds for “securing” the “identity of rules” and so for practices of “reciprocal criticism and mutual instruction.”
- 23 Cf. *PI* 211:

How can he *know* he is to continue a pattern by himself—whatever instructions you give him?—Well, how do I know?—If that means “Have I reasons?” the answer is: my reasons will soon give out. And then I shall act, without reasons.

- 24 *PI* 201.
- 25 *PI* 221.
- 26 *PI* 84, 288.
- 27 Another reason Brandom seems to miss the force of Wittgenstein’s paradox, indeed, is that he spends so much effort arguing against such conceptions of “norms” as autonomous that he misses Wittgenstein’s more basic challenge to the explanatory utility of the notions of “norms” and “facts” themselves.
- 28 *PI* 81.
- 29 See, for example, Brandom (1994), pp. 34, 63.
- 30 Brandom appears to concur with this when he follows Samuel Pufendorf in treating the institution of normative statuses as depending on the operation of authority, which is itself conceived as depending on the power of “obligating,” what Pufendorf calls “sovereignty.” Brandom seeks to discharge this suggestion of the authoritative basis of normative statuses by holding, along with Kant, that “our own acknowledgment or endorsement of a rule is the source of its authority over us” (Brandom (1994), p. 51). What goes missing is an analysis is a description of the *constitution* of this “us,” the ways its practices are defined and derived, and the possibility of the kind of failure of acknowledgment that I’ve discussed above.
- 31 In a recent text, Cavell reacts explicitly against Kripke’s interpretation of Wittgenstein’s rule-following paradox as requiring a “skeptical solution” in terms of the formulation of socially inculcated standards for various kinds of conventional language use. His criticism of Kripke’s communitarian solution also, if I am not mistaken, bears against Brandom’s picture of socially inculcated “implicit” norms:

But in taking Wittgenstein’s discovery to constitute for itself a skepticism about meaning, taken as the thesis that there is no fact which constitutes our meaning one thing rather than another, to which Wittgenstein then provides a solution in the form of a systematic demand for conformity to supposedly transparent interventions of the speech of others, Kripke at once accepts skepticism’s self-understanding as presenting a thesis, and attributes to the *Investigations* a picture of education, call it education as, let’s say, monitoring, both of which I find antithetical to Wittgenstein’s teaching in that text. Wittgenstein early speaks of training (for example, in § 5); it is strict, but it is limited. At some point, demonstration and monitoring come to an end, and the other goes on alone, and within bounds of mutuality, or not.

(Cavell 2005, p. 138)

Compare also the deconstructive treatment of some of these issues of force, authority, and violence in Derrida (1992).

32 In this paragraph and the next one, I am heavily indebted to Mulhall (2003).

33 Cavell (1969; 1979).

34 Cavell (1979), p. 185.

35 Cavell (1969), p. 52.

36 Cavell (1969), p. 50; compare the sentence from Brandom quoted above: "Applying a rule in particular circumstances is itself essentially something that can be done correctly or incorrectly."

37 Again, the reason for this is not that at some point norms must cede to "facts" purged of normativity or normative implications. It is, rather, that there is in an important sense no "all the way down"—that is, nothing requires that it must even be so much as possible for the theoretician to describe all of what is involved in our "game of giving and asking for reasons," whether in factual or normative terms. As far as we go with explanation, we may still find grounds for agreement lacking; and here (as I shall argue) what is needed is not further facts or norms, but something of a fundamentally different kind than either.

38 I should emphasize that, while I regard it as empty to call this idea of mutual attunement "merely metaphorical", I also do not take it to prove or explain anything. On the contrary, it is meant to question whether a philosophical explanation is needed, or wanted, for the fact of agreement in the language human beings use together, an explanation, say, in terms of meanings or conventions or basic terms or propositions which are to provide the foundation of our agreements. For nothing is deeper than the fact, or the extent, of agreement itself.

(Cavell 1979, p. 32)

39 Appealing to criteria is not a way of explaining or proving the fact of our attunement in words (hence in forms of life). It is only another description of the same fact; or rather, it is an appeal we make when the attunement is threatened or lost.

(Cavell 1979, p. 34)

40 Cavell 1979, p. 115.

41 In a helpful recent discussion of Cavell's uptake of the methods of ordinary language philosophy, Espen Hammer (Hammer 2002, p. 9) makes a similar point with respect to the responsibility of the speaker for her utterances; along similar lines Eldridge (1986) urges that claims of reason are essentially connected to claims of self-knowledge or understanding.

42 If what can be said in a language is not everywhere determined by rules, nor its understanding anywhere secured through universals, and if there are always new contexts to be met, new needs, new relationships, new objects, new perceptions to be recorded and shared, then perhaps it is as true of a master of language as of his apprentice that though "in a sense" we learn the meaning of words and what objects are, the learning is never over, and we keep finding new potencies in words and new ways in which objects are disclosed. The "routes of initiation" are never closed. But who is the authority when all are masters?

(Cavell 1979, p. 180)

For Brandom, by contrast, the "institution" of norms is always dependent on the imposition of (positive or negative) sanctions, whether these be understood as reducible to non-normative facts or definable only in terms of other norms (Brandom (1994), pp. 44–5).

43 Cavell (1979), p. 207.

- 44 Levinas (1961).
 45 Levinas (1974).
 46 Of course, there are alternatives to this reading of the significance of *logos* in Heidegger's texts (see Chapter 7 above).
 47 Levinas (1974), pp. 45–6.
 48 Levinas (1974), p. 48.
 49 Cavell discusses Levinas briefly in his recent *Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow* (2005, ch. 6). One remaining question that Cavell suggests, while nevertheless acknowledging the similarities between his and Levinas' understanding of the ethical relationship to the other, is about the basis for Levinas' claim that my responsibility to the other is "infinite" and his position, with respect to mine, necessarily captured in figures of "elevation" and height (Cavell 2005, p. 205).

9 The question of language

- 1 Wittgenstein 1933c, p. 11.
 2 The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. (One is unable to notice something—because it is always before one's eyes.) The real foundations of his enquiry do not strike a man at all. Unless *that* fact has at some time struck him.—And this means: we fail to be struck by what, once seen, is most striking and most powerful.
 (PI 129)

Compare Cavell's sense, in "Declining Decline" (Cavell 1989) of the significance of Wittgenstein's appeal to the ordinary:

Wittgenstein's insight is that the ordinary has, and alone has, the power to move the ordinary, to leave the human habitat habitable, the same transfigured. The practice of the ordinary may be thought of as the overcoming of iteration or replication or imitation by repetition, of counting by recounting, of calling by recalling. It is the familiar invaded by another familiar. Hence ordinary language procedures, like the procedures of psychoanalysis, inherently partake of the uncanny.

(p. 47)

- 3 Cf. the first sentences of Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, which declares, in a different register, the same paradoxical turn to language:

However the topic is considered, the *problem of language* has never been simply one problem among others. But never as much as at present has it invaded, *as such*, the global horizon of the most diverse researches and the most heterogeneous discourses, diverse and heterogeneous in their intention, method, and ideology . . . It indicates, as if in spite of itself, that a historico-metaphysical epoch *must* finally determine as language the totality of its problematic horizon. It must do so not only because all that desire had wished to wrest from the play of language finds itself recaptured within that play but also because, for the same reason, language itself is menaced in its very life, helpless, adrift in the threat of limitlessness, brought back to its own finitude at the very moment when its limits seem to disappear, when it ceases to be self-assured, contained, and guaranteed by the infinite signified which seemed to exceed it.

(Derrida 1967, p. 6)

- 4 A typical statement is given in the preface of Biletzki and Matar (1998): "It seems beyond argument that analytic philosophy has been, for some time now,

- in a state of crisis—dealing with its self-image, its relationships with philosophical alternatives, its fruitfulness and even legitimacy in the general philosophical community.” (p. xi)
- 5 Some recent versions of the naturalist project that bear on language are, for example, Millikan (1984), Papineau (1993), Dretske (1997) and Fodor (1992). Several of these projects, in particular, attempt to explain meaning or intentionality in terms of teleological notions drawn from the philosophy of biology. Others attempt to “naturalize” meaning by portraying it as a kind of natural correspondence.
 - 6 Of course, if the phrase “adequately explained” is taken as meaning “explained in terms of structures of facts,” then this claim becomes a tautology and is certainly justified (although it no longer determines a research project). To take it this way, however, is to beg two questions that ought to be kept open, since they are in fact open in the history of the analytic tradition: first, what counts as criteria for a “complete,” “total,” or “adequate” causal explanation; and second (and more importantly) whether and to what extent what is wanted from an understanding of language is an “explanation” at all.
 - 7 Kripke (1972).
 - 8 The suggestion of applying Kripke’s framework to natural-kind terms is developed by Putnam (1975).
 - 9 For these developments, see for example Lewis (1986) and Stalnaker (1976).
 - 10 For a recent comprehensive treatment that develops all of these historical and interpretive suggestions, see Soames 2003, vol. II.
 - 11 Couldn’t I look at language as a social institution that is subject to certain rules because otherwise it wouldn’t be effective? But here’s the problem: I cannot make this last claim; I cannot give any justification of the rules, not even like this. I can only describe them as a game that people play.
(Wittgenstein 1933b, p. 145)
 - 12 Cf. *PI* 23: “But how many kinds of sentence are there? Say assertion, question, and command?—There are *countless* kinds: countless different kinds of use of what we call ‘symbols’, ‘words’, ‘sentences’.”
 - 13 In a far-ranging recent text (Hanna and Harrison 2004), Patricia Hanna and Bernard Harrison undertake to solve what they take to be a central debate between realism and conventionalism about linguistic categories and reference. They do so by means of a “two-stage” theory of language, whereby objective linguistic reference is accomplished only in the context of conventionally designed and maintained “practices.” Though they formulate many interesting points and touch on issues of importance, the account is ultimately vitiated—like the accounts of Brandom and Kripke we have examined above—by their unargued reliance on the assumption that reference to what we can see as the purposes of “practices” suffices, by itself, to provide an answer to the question of how *any* symbol gains sense. (Consider, for instance, their endorsement of the practice-based “solution” to Kripke’s rule-following paradox that they derive from Goddard (1961) (Hanna and Harrison 2004, p. 185).)
 - 14 Cf. *PI* 363:

I should like to say: you regard it much too much as a matter of course that one can tell anything to anyone. That is to say: we are so much accustomed to communication through language, in conversation, that it looks to us as if the whole point of communication lay in this: someone else grasps the sense of my words—which is something mental: he as it were takes it into his own mind. If he then does something further with it as well, that is no part of the immediate purpose of language.

In the *Big Typescript*, Wittgenstein makes the critique of “communication” even more explicit: “If it were said: ‘Language is everything one can use to communicate with’, then it needs to be asked: What does ‘communicating’ consist in?” (Wittgenstein 1933b, p. 146). The remark comes in a section of the *Typescript* entitled “Language in Our Sense not Defined as an Instrument for a Particular Purpose. Grammar is not a Mechanism Justified by its Purpose.”

- 15 Austin (1940), p. 56.
- 16 Austin (1940), pp. 57–8. I owe some of the ideas in the paragraphs to follow to Alan Nelson.
- 17 Austin (1940), p. 61.
- 18 Austin (1940), p. 62.
- 19 Cf. Ryle (1953):

Later on, when philosophers were in revolt against psychologism in logic, there was a vogue for another idiom, the idiom of talking about the *meanings* of expressions . . . They construed the verb “to mean” as standing for a relation between an expression and some other entity. The meaning of an expression was taken to be an entity which had that expression for its name. So studying the meaning of the phrase “the solar system” was supposed or half-supposed to be the same thing as studying the solar system. It was partly in reaction against this erroneous view that philosophers came to prefer the idiom “the use of the expressions ‘ . . . caused . . . ’ and ‘ . . . the solar system’”. . . . Learning how to manage a canoe-paddle, a traveller’s cheque or a postage-stamp, is not being introduced to an extra entity. Nor is learning how to manage the words “if”, “ought” and “limit”.

(pp. 172–3)

Compare also Quine’s (1969b) criticism of what he calls a “museum myth” of substantial meanings and the “externalist” argument of Putnam (1975).

- 20 Compare Cavell’s (1979) reading of the same tendency to criticize “the objectification of meaning”:

“The meaning is the use” calls attention to the fact that what an expression means is a function of what it is used to mean or to say on specific occasions by human beings. That such an obvious fact should assume the importance it does is itself surprising. And to trace the intellectual history of philosophy’s concentration on the meaning of particular words and sentences, in isolation from a systematic attention to their concrete uses would be a worthwhile undertaking. It is a concentration one of whose consequences is the traditional search for the meaning of a word in various realms of objects, another of which is the idea of a perfect understanding as being achievable only through the construction of a perfect language. A fitting title for this history would be: Philosophy and the Rejection of the Human.

(pp. 206–7)

- 21 Davidson (1973b).
- 22 Davidson (1965; 1970; 1973).
- 23 Davidson (1973b; 1974a).
- 24 Davidson (1974b).
- 25 Davidson 1986, p. 446.
- 26 Rorty (1986, p. 353) reads Davidson’s moral as allowing a dissolution of the temptation to impose *tertium* between “us” and “the world” which, according to Rorty “created the old metaphysical issues in the first place.” This conclusion is continuous with Rorty’s endorsement, in a series of articles of what he takes to

- be the anti-representationalist moral of Davidson's repudiation of conceptual schemes. But as we have seen, a different, more critically sensitive way of taking Davidson's point could allow for the best results methods of the analytic tradition to be seen as critically continuous with the metaphysics they (partially) repudiate in their ability to interpret this temptation itself.
- 27 McDowell (1994), p. xvi.
- 28 McDowell (1994), pp. 9ff.
- 29 This conception of "world" itself has its roots in Heidegger's (1927) description of "being-in-the-world."
- 30 McDowell (1994), pp. 124–5.
- 31 McDowell (1994), p. 126.
- 32 McDowell's text, like many of the twentieth-century texts that formulate structuralism, thus enlists what is envisioned as our access to the rational structure of language in part to help consolidate a distinction between human beings and those animals that are conceived as, definitively, innocent of it. The gesture is the same as the philosophically conservative one that identifies human nature with rationality in order to draw an enforce a distinction between humans and animals, and is coeval with the ancient definition of the human being as the *zoon logon echon*, the "animal having language" or "animale rationale"; for some critical thoughts, see Derrida (1987) and Agamben (2002).
- 33 McDowell (1994), pp. 34–5.
- 34 Cf. the moral of Rorty (1975).
- 35 The point seems to affect some versions of the "resolute interpretation" of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* (cf. Chapters 1, 3 and 6 above). For if it is indeed incoherent to (even so much as) suppose there could be a perspective "outside language" from which we could view it as a whole, then it cannot be the point of Wittgenstein's practice to (even so much as) *repudiate* the claim that there is such a perspective. For a version of this point, see Hacker (2000).
- 36 Cavell (1979), p. 239.
- 37 In a far-ranging recent work, Ranier Schürmann (1996) has described the history of Western thought and action in terms of the successive dominance of a series of guiding images or idealities, imaginatively grounded structures of pre-determination that he calls "hegemonic phantasms" and that act to interpret the basic meaning of being at any particular time. Equally conversant with Wittgenstein and Heidegger, Schürmann reads the origin of these organizing phantasms as deeply linguistic:

The gap between the being a word presumes and the ordinary use it serves never closes up, and thoroughly preserving this gap is a never-ending task. Witness the ceaseless struggle in the *Philosophical Investigations* against the in-itself or essence, against everything that may be grasped from within. His is a battle without end as was Kant's dispersing of transcendental illusions. The drive of idioms that speak to us as if they made us grasp things from within them—as if we were grasping them within ourselves—is a thoroughgoing drive. . . . There is an evil lodged in everyday speech, manifesting itself in the dispersion of singular cases from which rises the megalomania of saying what is.

(Schürmann 1996, p. 33)

- 38 Grammatical rules, as they currently exist, are rules for the use of words. Even if we transgress them we can still use words meaningfully. Then what do they exist for? To make language-use as a whole uniform? (Say for aesthetic reasons?) To make possible the use of language as a social institution? And thus—like a set of traffic rules—to prevent a collision? (But what concern

is it of ours if that happens?) The collision that mustn't come about must be the collision that can't come about! That is to say, without grammar it isn't a bad language, but no language.

(Wittgenstein 1933b, p. 147)

- 39 In this paragraph I am indebted to the reflective analysis of Giorgio Agamben (1993). In "Form-of-Life" he hyphenates the Wittgensteinian phrase to interpret it as alluding to the possibility of a futural life that can no longer be separated from its form (and so cannot any longer be captured or controlled by the informing projects of metaphysics). He describes its significance this way:

By the term form-of-life, on the other hand, I mean a life that can never be separated from its form, a life in which it is never possible to isolate something such as naked life. A life that cannot be separated from its form is a life for which what is at stake in its way of living is living itself. What does this formulation mean? It defines a life—human life—in which the single ways, acts, and processes of living are never simply facts but always and above all possibilities of life, always and above all power. Each behavior and each form of human living is never prescribed by a specific biological vocation, nor is it assigned by whatever necessity; instead, no matter how customary, repeated, and socially compulsory, it always retains the character of a possibility; that is, it always puts at stake living itself.

(unnumbered pages)

For more on the significance of the vision of language for this vision of life, see also Agamben (1984).

- 40 Wittgenstein 1933b, p. 210.
41 Compare, also, Plato's *Cratylus*, 400b–d:

Hermogenes: What are we going to say about the next one?

Socrates: Are you referring to the name "body"?

Hermogenes: Yes.

Socrates: There's a lot to say, it seems to me—and if one distorted the name a little, there would be even more. Thus some people say that the body [soma] is the tomb [sema] of the soul, on the grounds that it is entombed in its present life, while others say that it is correctly called "a sign" ["sema"] because the soul signifies whatever it wants to signify by means of the body.

- 42 The picture is the same as the one that produces the metaphysical conception of a rule:

You say that pointing to a red object is the primary sign for "red". But pointing to a red object is nothing more than a particular motion of the hand towards a red object, and is no sign at all except within a system. If you say you mean: pointing to a red object understood as a sign—then I say: The understanding that is our concern is not a process that accompanies the pointing (say, a process in the brain), and if you do mean such a process after all, then it too is not inherently a sign. Again and again the idea here is that meaning, interpretation, is a process that accompanies the pointing and provides it with a soul, as it were (without which it would be dead).

Here it seems as if the sign were a summary of all of grammar—that the latter is contained in it like a string of pearls in a box and that all we have to

do is pull it out. (But it is precisely this picture that leads us astray.) As if understanding were an instantaneous grasping of something, and all one had to do was then to draw out its consequences; so that these consequences already existed in an ideal sense before they were drawn.

(Wittgenstein 1933b, pp. 126–7)

Compare, also, *PI* 36: “Where our language suggests a body and there is none: there, we should like to say, is a *spirit*.”

43 Elsewhere, Wittgenstein puts the point this way:

I don’t think that logic can talk about sentences in any other sense than we ordinarily do when we say “Here’s a sentence that’s been written down” or “No, that only looks like a sentence but isn’t one”, etc. etc.

(Wittgenstein 1933b, p. 57)

Compare *PI* 108:

The philosophy of logic speaks of sentences and words in exactly the sense in which we speak of them in ordinary life when we say e.g. “Here is a Chinese sentence”, or “No, that only looks like writing; it is actually just an ornament” and so on.

We are talking about the spatial and temporal phenomenon of language, not about some non-spatial, non-temporal chimera [*Note in margin*: Only it is possible to be interested in a phenomenon in a variety of ways].

44 The difference between signified and signifier belongs in a profound and implicit way to the totality of the great epoch covered by the history of metaphysics, and in a more explicit and more systematically articulated way to the narrower epoch of Christian creationism and infinitism when these appropriate the resources of Greek conceptuality. This appurtenance is essential and irreducible; one cannot retain the convenience of the “scientific truth” of the Stoic and later medieval opposition between signans and signatum without also bringing with it all its metaphysico-theological roots. To these roots adheres not only the distinction between the sensible and the intelligible—already a great deal—with all that it controls, namely metaphysics in its totality. And this distinction is generally accepted as self-evident by the most careful linguists and semiologists, even by those who believe that the scientificity of their work begins where metaphysics ends.

(Derrida 1967, p. 13)

45 Heidegger (1959), pp. 400–1.

46 Heidegger quotes Wilhelm von Humboldt’s (1836) *On the Diversity of the Structure of Human Language and Its Influence on the Intellectual Development of Mankind*:

Even its preservation through writing is always a merely incomplete preservation, a kind of mummification, which is necessary if we are to try to render once again the delivery of the living word. Language itself is not a work, but an activity. Its true definition can thus only be a genetic one. For language is the eternally self-repeating *labor of spirit* to make *articulated sound* capable of being expression of *thought*. Taken strictly and directly, this is the definition of every instance of *speaking*; but in the true and essential sense, one can also regard the totality of such speech only as an approximation to language.

(Heidegger 1959, p. 403)

- 47 Heidegger (1938a), pp. 353–4.
 48 In Heidegger's own texts after the 1930s, constant reminders of the ongoing prevalence of the categories of metaphysics and the difficulties of simply escaping them are delicately balanced with attempts, like that in the quotation above, to portray the unity of sound and sense in language in non-metaphysical terms. See, for example, Heidegger (1957a), pp. 98–9:

And let no one suppose that we mean to belittle vocal sounds as physical phenomena, the merely sensuous side of language, in favor of what is called the meaning and sense-content of what was said and is esteemed as being of the spirit, the spirit of language. It is much more important to consider whether, in any of the ways of looking at the structure of language we have mentioned, the physical element of language, its vocal and written character, is being adequately experienced; whether it is sufficient to associate sound exclusively with the body understood in physiological terms, and to place it within the metaphysically conceived confines of the sensuous.

- 49 Cf. Wittgenstein: "'Language' and 'living being'. The concept of a living being is as indeterminate as the concept of language." (Wittgenstein 1933b, p. 146)
 50 Saussure (1913) first formulated the notorious thesis of the "arbitrariness" of the signifier/signified relation; see also Derrida's critical discussion in Derrida 1967, ch. 1.
 51 We may therefore take the late Wittgenstein's critique of rule-following to involve, *to a first approximation*, what Diamond (1991) calls the "realistic spirit" in contrast to the spirit of metaphysics:

I understand by metaphysics the laying down of metaphysical requirements, whether in the form of views about what there is ... or in the rather different form exhibited by the *Tractatus* and also (as I believe) in Frege's work ... Wittgenstein's kind of response ... is that of the realistic spirit. The criticism of the metaphysical demand by Wittgenstein is never that what is demanded *is not there*, that there are no facts of the kind which is necessary if the demand is to be met. Our needs *are* met, but how they are met we can see only by what Wittgenstein calls the "rotation of the axis of reference of our examination about the fixed point of our real need" (*PI* 1, section 108).
 (Diamond 1991, p. 20)

But only to a first approximation. For if—as I have argued—the sources of metaphysical "requirements" are as pervasive as language itself, and if their satisfactions are therefore no more to be found on the level of the ordinary practice that invokes them incessantly than on the level of the philosophical discourses that theorize them explicitly, how shall we know, and how guarantee, what Diamond assumes, that we can indeed see them to be satisfied by the circumstances of an ordinary life that we can know as such?

- 52 In order to exceed metaphysics it is necessary that a trace be inscribed within the text of metaphysics, a trace that continues to signal not in the direction of another presence, or another form of presence, but in the direction of an entirely other text. Such a trace cannot be thought *more metaphysico*. No philosopheme is prepared to master it. And it (is) that which must elude mastery. Only presence is mastered.

The mode of inscription of such a trace in the text of metaphysics is so unthinkable that it must be described as an erasure of the trace itself. The trace is produced as its own erasure. And it belongs to the trace to erase itself, to elude that which might maintain it in presence. The trace is neither perceptible nor imperceptible ...

But at the same time, the erasure of the trace must have been traced in the metaphysical text. Presence, then, far from being, as is commonly thought, *what* the sign signifies, what a trace refers to, presence, then, is the trace of the trace, the trace of the erasure of the trace. Such is, for us, the text of metaphysics, and such is, for us, the language which we speak.

(Derrida 1968, pp. 65–6)

- 53 Wittgenstein (1933c), p. 6.
 54 Wittgenstein (1933c), p. 6.
 55 Wittgenstein (1933c), p. 7. Wittgenstein's claim here does not rest on some (possibly tendentious) attempt to distinguish "facts" from "norms" or purge language of an inherently "normative" vocabulary. For even a "normative" proposition remains a proposition; it stands in relationships of justification and inference to other propositions and cannot express the claims of *absolute* value in which Wittgenstein is interested.
 56 Wittgenstein (1933c), p. 7.
 57 Wittgenstein's scattered references to the problem of the existence of the world bears comparison to phenomenological analyses of the nature of the "world," including Husserl's notion of the "life-world." For an interesting discussion, see Gier (1981), ch. 6.
 58 Wittgenstein (1933c), p. 10.
 59 Wittgenstein (1933c), pp. 11–12.
 60 *TLP* 6.45.
 61 "That there is language is as certain as it is incomprehensible, and this incomprehensibility and certainty constitute faith and revelation." (Agamben 1984, p. 42). Compare Wittgenstein (1933b):

Again and again there is the attempt to delimit and to display the world in language—but that doesn't work. The self-evidence of the world is expressed in the very fact that language signifies only it, and can only signify it.

(p. 315)

- 62 Cf. Derrida's response, in a 2001 conference, to the question whether ordinary language "constantly invites its own misunderstanding":

I don't know if I am answering your question, but if I never use the concept of ordinary language in my name—I just quote it or borrow it—it is because I do not see a radical and necessary opposition (and I am not against oppositions and distinctions as such) between the ordinary and the extraordinary. This does not mean that, for me, all language is "simply" ordinary. While I think there is nothing else but ordinary language, I also think that there are miracles, that what I said about the impossible implies the constant call for the extraordinary. Take, for example, trusting someone, believing, someone. This is part of the most ordinary experience of language. When I speak to someone and say "Believe me", that is part of everyday language. And yet in this "Believe me" there is a call for the most extraordinary. To trust someone, to believe, is an act of faith which is totally heterogeneous to proof, totally heterogeneous to perception. It is the emergence, the appearance in language, of something which resists anything simply ordinary. So, while I am not against distinctions, I cannot rely on the concept of "ordinary language".

(Glendinning 2001, pp. 119–20)

- 63 Agamben (1984), p. 45.

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