

DAWES HICKS LECTURE

THEORIES OF MEANING

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Read 6 November 1980

I

How are we to approach the phenomenon of language, that people say things and others understand them? The fact that words and other signs have meaning can seem incredibly deep, enigmatic, difficult to understand. The sense of depth comes both from the realization that language is somehow essential to human life, that is, to whatever we unreflectingly want to identify as essential to being human; and also from the very pervasiveness of meaning in our lives, the difficulty of getting the phenomena in focus. We are in a sense surrounded by meaning; in the words we exchange, in all the signs we deploy, in the art, music, literature we create and enjoy, in the very shape of the man-made environment most of us live in; and not least, in the internal speech we rarely cease addressing to ourselves silently, or to absent others.

The sense of depth can easily turn into a sense of mystery. But here something in us, or our modern culture, may resist. We can call it our commitment to reason, or to scientific thought. Language must be a phenomenon of nature just like all others. Perhaps it is a characteristic of only one species (and even this is supposedly challenged by work on chimps), but this doesn't make it any less a natural phenomenon. It should therefore be understandable in the same way. It should be open to investigation, and ultimately understood/explained by some theory. The problem is just to find the right one.

This stance towards language goes back quite a few centuries. We find it clearly in evidence in eighteenth-century attempts to give a naturalistic account of the origin of language (Condillac's was one of the best known). But these theories in turn were based on the polemical, no-nonsense nominalism of the seventeenth century which we find, for example, in Hobbes and Locke.

This nominalism had complex motivations, and finding a

scientific understanding of language was not the primary one. But finding an adequate language of science was. One of the principal concerns of both Hobbes and Locke was to ground our picture of the empirical world in the firm foundations provided by clear unequivocal definitions of basic terms. But doing this meant demystifying language, showing it up to be a pliant instrument of thought, very important, but still an instrument. It was perverse to seek in language a domain of authority for our beliefs. 'Words are wise men's counters . . . , but they are the money of fools,' says Hobbes.¹

Of course, the temptation to do something which empiricists could identify as misplacing one's trust in language itself sprang from a conception of the universe as in some sense a meaningful order, i.e. an order of being which could be explained in terms of the ideas it embodied, or the correspondences it exhibited between different domains, or some other such ultimately semiological categories. The new nominalism was a centrepiece of what has been called the disenchantment of the world. It was close, that is, to the spirit of the nascent modern science.

It castigated these semiological cosmologies as projections, 'sciences as we would', as Bacon called them. The whole attempt to find the ideas or forms basic to reality involves us in the delusive game of placing there what we supposedly discover. What we must seek is not to identify ideas or meanings, but to build an adequate representation of things. The notion of a representation can be seen as playing an important role implicitly and explicitly in this period, as Foucault has argued.²

When we hold that knowing X is having a (correct) representation of X, one of the things we establish is the neat separation of ideas, thoughts, descriptions and the like, on one hand, and what those ideas, etc., are about on the other.

A representation (in the sense of the term of art I am using here) is of an independent reality. This is not the only possible model for knowledge; nor is it the only possible model that springs to philosophically uninstructed common sense. There are all kinds of knowing, from knowings how, to knowing people intimately, which don't have to be construed representationally. We have a temptation to do so when we reflect, because we are heritors of this modern movement in philosophy which made representation basic. I am suggesting that one of the stronger motives for making it so basic was the desire to overcome projection, and what we later call 'anthropomorphism', that promiscuous mixing of our own

¹ *Leviathan*, ch. 4.

² *Les Mots et les Choses*, ch. 3.

intuitions of meaning, relevance, importance with objective reality.

Rational thought seeking knowledge of the world tries to build representations. Words are indispensable instruments for such buildings, for they allow us to deal with whole classes of ideas at a time, and avoid our having to construct our picture of the world particular by particular, as it were. But if they are to be useful such instruments, it has to be clear what elements of the world (represented reality) they attach to; or alternatively, if we take seriously the 'way of ideas', we must be clear what ideas, i.e. part representations, they designate. On either construal, their role is to connect with things either mediately or immediately; and the connection must be fully in our control, if we are to use them to understand.

What naturally emerges from this is a highly designative view of meaning. Words have meaning because they stand for things (or perhaps ideas, and thus only mediately for things). They 'signify' things, to use the old language. So you capture the phenomena of meaning if you see how words attach to their designata in this way. And this ultimately is explicable by the fact that minds use them as marks or notes for things (or ideas).

And so we get the notion which our contemporary theories had to overcome: the meaning of a word is what it designates. Meaning is designation. This theory was partly motivated by (what were seen as) epistemological considerations, the need to have an adequate language for valid knowledge.

But there was another way in which the modern conception of science could help generate an approach to meaning, and this can come into play when we try to consider man as an object of science. Suppose we try to apply to man the same naturalistic strictures: no projection. Then we can conceive the idea of understanding a phenomenon like language as we would any other in extra-human nature, i.e. without invoking any underlying ideas or thoughts. For this extreme naturalism the basic phenomena of language are the sounds we emit, the marks we make; understanding them is seeing how they are evoked by what surrounds us, and in turn trigger off behaviour.

Extreme naturalism, of course, abstracts from ideas and thoughts, and everything 'inner', as it does also from intentions. But with this important distinction, it is very much on the same wavelength as the modern designative theory. Both consider the question of meaning in terms of correlations between words and things, words and behaviours. So extreme naturalism could grow

quite easily, one might say naturally, out of the designative tradition. One can see it, in a sense, as the empiricist view with its scientific scrupulousness pushed a stage further, to the denial (or the ignoring) of the mental altogether. But it retains the idea of the word functioning as a designator. The line of descent between, say, Helvétius and Skinner is very evident. And indeed, the extreme mechanism of this radical naturalism was prepared for in the classical tradition by the recourse to such mechanistic explanations as the association of ideas (ancestor of S-R).

Now the tradition of naturalist explanation, the interdict on anthropomorphic projection, is what can give us pause before our sense of mystery. But not necessarily in the form of radical naturalism. This tends to be discredited. Of course, it has its contemporary defenders, most spectacularly B. F. Skinner who shows its application to language in his *Verbal Behaviour*.¹ But Chomsky and others have destroyed this in our eyes, and rendered this approach wildly implausible. Our emitting the different words we do is just obviously too loosely related to the supposedly correlated environmental stimuli. We cannot seem to get away with an understanding of language which doesn't have recourse to thoughts, intentions and the like.

But the undermining of radical naturalism in this domain has also been abetted by the decline of pure designativism. The major breaches in this view for this philosophical culture were those made by Frege. And we can see how closely they are intricately with the considerations weighing against extreme naturalism.

We could put it this way: what Frege shows to be wrong with a pure designative theory of meaning is that it ignores the activity underlying meaningful uses of language. Only in the context of a sentence does a word have meaning, because it takes a sentence to do what we do with words, i.e. in highly general terms, say something. The designativist, one who tries to explicate meaning in terms of the things designated by the terms, has to take account of this activity, because it affects how words relate to things. In the assertion, we must distinguish two important roles, referring and saying something of a referent, and the way words relate to what we might think of as their designata is different in these different roles.

Or to come at what is ultimately the same point from another direction: sentences are not just lists of words. If the meaning of a sentence can be grasped from our knowledge of the meaning of the constituent words, this can't just be by concatenating the

¹ London, 1957.

designata. Understanding a series of designata is not understanding what is said. For this, we have to know what's being done with the words, and grasping this activity requires that we understand something of the roles different words play in the sentence.

Even more clearly than with his concept/object distinction, Frege shatters the designative view with his sense/reference distinction. He forces the designativist to recognize that we cannot give an account of meaning just in terms of words and what they designate. We have to distinguish this latter, the reference, from the sense. Specifying the sense is specifying the speaker/hearer's route in to the reference. But this Fregean image of a route invokes the underlying activity. Words are not just attached to referents like correlations we meet in nature; they are used to grasp these referents; i.e. they figure in an activity. And thus they differ in the way or manner or route by which they effect their ends.

So the designative view is undermined for the same kind of reason as radical naturalism, viz., that neither can take account of the matrix of activity within which the connections between words and their referents arise and are sustained. Their models are either natural correlation, or arbitrary labelling, but neither even approach adequacy to our linguistic activity. The discrediting of the designative theory of meaning has played an important part in the decline of behaviourism.

But what emerges in the Anglo-Saxon world is a range of theories which are still in line of descent from the original epistemological and naturalist insights. They are still founded on the notion of a representation. While based on the understanding that meaning is not simple designation, they identify the crucial activity relevant for linguistic meaning as the framing of linguistic representations. By this I don't mean of course that they espouse the picture theory of meaning attributed to the early Wittgenstein; rather I mean that the dimension of speech activity which is the focus of a theory of meaning is seen as that whereby it offers depictions, potential or actual of an independent reality, wherein it codes information, one might say, potential or actual, about reality.

This is evident in truth-conditional theories of meaning, for instance. It has been argued that there must be one key concept which applies in deriving the meaning of all sentences; and that this concept must be truth. But to say that the key concept of our theory of meaning will be truth—the key concept—is to say that what we must primarily focus on is the way that words form

depictions, or clusters of potential information, i.e. candidates for truth or falsity.

And even those writers who feel chary of asserting from the beginning that truth is the key concept, and that the theorems of a theory of meaning can take the form: 's is true if p', wish to argue for it in a way which clearly makes representation central. The theory of meaning is seen as one component of a global account of people saying what they do (or emitting the noises they emit). It is a component which maps what is said on to what is the case in such a way that along with plausible hypotheses about people's desires and intentions it issues in plausible ascriptions of propositional attitudes to the speakers.¹

Of course it is no part of the intentions of these theorists to claim that making potential depictions is all we do in language; as though our only interest were in describing things, and making assertions. On the contrary, they recognize that we also ask questions, give commands, make requests, and so on. But the claim is that the kernel which is similar in all these speech acts, and which is relevant for the theory of meaning, is the representative or depictive. A request, order, question, also depict: they give a linguistic representation of a state of things, viz., that we are asking to be brought about, or ordering to be brought about, or about which we are enquiring whether it holds or not.

Thus in developing our truth-conditional theory of meaning from the facts of language use, one important phase, according to McDowell, followed by Platts, will be the sifting out of the various speech-acts a certain basic component, similar in form in all. This, which Platts calls the 'monistic transformational component',² is in fact what has been described in other terminology as the 'propositional content' of the different acts. It is the depiction they are all held to contain of some possible state of affairs. And extricating this in each case is clearly necessary if we wish to account for meaning in terms of truth, to account for the meanings of words in terms of the contributions they can make to depictions or representations of things.

Thus truth-conditional theories, and others in the Anglo-Saxon world which share this basic orientation, remain faithful to the modern conception of language at least in this, that they take the primary linguistic phenomenon, the principal object of a theory of meaning, to be representation. What is it we have to understand

¹ Cf. J. McDowell in Evans and McDowell (eds.), *Truth and Meaning*, Oxford 1976, pp. 42-66; and M. Platts, *Ways of Meaning*, pp. 58-63.

² In M. Platts (ed.), *Reference, Truth and Reality*, London 1980, p. 3.

in order to understand meaning? Primarily this, that with words we manage to frame representations. These representations are used for a host of purposes: we not only encode information by them, and transmit it; we also make known our desires, get people to do things, ask for information through these representations, and so on. Not to mention all the playful and ironic and imaginative uses. Some of these purposes might be effected without language. We might silently bend some stranger to our will through pointing and threatening gestures. But when we effect them in language, then the question of meaning arises. And this phenomenon, that words have meaning, which can appear so deep and enigmatic, this is to be understood ultimately as residing in the fact that words serve us in our framing of representations. Once we have understood this, we have understood meaning. So give us a theory of how we combine words to make such descriptions, and we have a theory of meaning.

The stress on a theory showing how we combine is obviously well-motivated. Because the striking fact about language is its potentially endless inventiveness. There is a non-definite number of discriminable such depictions that the competent speaker can devise, or understand. His ability to devise/understand new ones seems mediated by his familiarity with the words that they are composed of. Indeed, we find it easy to assume that the vocabulary of any given speaker, although perhaps very large, is finite. And so it appears that his ability to produce/understand an indefinite number of sentences is a case of achieving infinite ends through finite means, to quote Humboldt.¹

Thus a theory showing how this combination comes about, how depictions are generated in language, would be a theory of meaning.

So, the contemporary theories of meaning, although they have broken with the crass designativism which was born out of seventeenth-century nominalism, remain faithful to it at least in this, that they see meaning in terms of representations. Understanding language is understanding how we represent things in language. In this way they remain faithful to the concerns of modern epistemology: we have to show how language can be a vehicle of knowledge as modern epistemology conceives it.

But these theories also remain in the line of modern naturalism. They are meant to be theories derived through naturalistic observation. As in the accounts of McDowell and Platts above, or

¹ *Ueber die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Berlin 1907, vol. 6.

in Davidson's 'Radical Interpretation' paper,¹ we see these theories as potentially derivable from, and verifiable in the behaviour, linguistic and other, of some foreign tribe. We could imagine coming to learn their language this way, through observing the noises they make, the situations in which they make them, what they seem to be desiring and intending, what knowledge of things it is plausible to attribute to them, and so on.

In other words, like all naturalistic theories, these theories are framed as theories elaborated by an observer about an object observed but not participated in. This is not to say that there is a bar on participation in the object studied; or even that there might not be crucial advantages in participating, that this might make evidence available that was otherwise unobtainable. But the form of the theory is such that it is meant to be comprehensible to the pure observer. It is not cast in language, nor does it invoke connections, which could only be comprehensible to one who in some sense participated in the reality studied.

This is the importance, I think, of the Quinean fable, taken up by many other writers in the field, of the foreign observer, ignorant of the local language, who develops a theory by observing the natives, and noting what noises they make in what circumstances. So powerful is the underlying theoretical a priori that many philosophers convince themselves you actually could learn a language this way. Which is what I want to challenge.

We can sum up by saying that there seem to be two crucial features of currently dominant theories of meaning in the Anglo-Saxon world: their stress on representations, and their assumption of the observer's stance. These are both linked, of course. They have the same roots in the seventeenth-century concern with epistemological reconstruction, and the ensuing stress on naturalistic explanation. And indeed, they are inwardly connected. Seeing theory as observer's theory is another way of allowing the primacy of representation: for a theory also, on this view, should be representation of an independent reality. A theory of meaning is a representation of a process which is itself the generation of representations. It all hangs together.

Both these features undoubtedly will seem obviously inescapable to many. What other key semantic notion can there be beside truth? And what else can a theory do than represent an independent reality? But both can be challenged, and are by another conception of meaning, to which I now want to turn.

¹ *Dialectica*, 27 (1973), 313-28.

II

This alternative conception of meaning that I now want to look at is the one that comes to us through Herder and Humboldt, in different ways also Hamann; which has been taken up in our day by Heidegger and others. I could call it the 'Romantic' theory, or family of theories; I could call it 'expressive', which is a term I've used elsewhere. But maybe the best policy is to avoid any descriptive mode of reference, and call it simply the triple-H theory.

This view also protests against the classical designative view, that it neglects the activity of speech. Humboldt argues that language seen as a lexicon, a system of terms linked to designata, or a quantum of resources now available for the description of things, that language as seen in any of these ways is secondary; what is primary is the activity of speaking, within which this system is constantly being made and modified. What is important is to understand language as *energeia*, not just *ergon*.¹ This is a criticism which seems parallel to the one I claim can be seen as underlying the Fregean contribution.

But there are very important differences. The most important concern the HHH conception of what is going on in language. Perhaps most of us would agree today on some version of the Humboldtian thesis of the primacy of activity. But the important question remains of what the activity or activities is/are within which our lexicon, or linguistic resources, develop and change. Is the primary such activity that of framing representation? In Saussurian terminology, we know that the *langue* is formed by the many acts of *parole*. But what is the nature of this speaking activity?

I want to abstract out from the various theories of the HHH type three important aspects of language activity. I don't claim that these are found together in this form in any writer. But I think that together they are both highly plausible, and that they force us to look at the theory of meaning in a different light. These are three (mutually compatible) answers to the question: what are we bringing about in language and essentially through language, i.e. such that it can only be brought through language?

The list of things that one could bring forward as plausible answers to this question is probably indefinite. Some would be relatively peripheral, some extremely important to our understanding of language and our linguistic capacity. The three I want to mention now are supposedly of great importance in this respect.

¹ Op. cit.

1. The first I want to mention is this: in language we formulate things. Through language we can bring to explicit awareness what we formerly had only an implicit sense of. Through formulating some matter, we bring it to fuller and clearer consciousness. This is the function that Herder focuses on in his critique of Condillac in the *Essay on the Origin of Language*.¹

Let's look more closely at this activity. What happens, for example, when we have something we want to say and can't, and then find the words for? What does formulation bring off? What is it to be able to say something, to make it explicit? Let's say I am trying to formulate how I feel, or how something looks, or how she behaved. I struggle to find an adequate expression; and then I get it. What have I achieved?

Well to start with, I can now focus properly on the matter in question. When I still don't know how to describe how I feel, or how it looks, etc., the objects concerned lack definite contours; I don't quite know what to focus on in focusing on them. Finding an adequate articulation for what I want to say about these matters brings them in focus. To find a description in this case is to identify a feature of the matter at hand and thereby to grasp its contour, to get a proper view of it.

In the above paragraph, I find myself using visual metaphors, which are the ones that seem to come naturally to us, at least in our civilization, when describing what is involved in articulation. The point of these metaphors is that coming to articulate our sense of some matter is inseparable from coming to identify its features. It is these that our descriptions pick out; and having an articulated view of something is grasping how the different features or aspects are related. We use 'articulate' both as an adjective and a verb, but the first is derivative from the second. We speak of someone who can express himself as 'articulate', because he can articulate and lay out the contours of what he has a sense of.

We can see this by contrast with another kind of case where I am looking for a word: for instance, where I seek the word in a foreign language, already having it in English; or where I seek the technical term for a feature of some engine or plant, or the terrain, which I can quite well identify with some adequate description: 'the long metal part sticking out on the left', or 'the elongated blue tube between the petals'. These are very different from the cases where I am seeking a language to identify how I feel, or to make clear just how it looks, or to define just what it was that was peculiar about her behaviour. Finding language in these latter

¹ *Ueber den Ursprung der Sprache*, Berlin 1959, pp. 28 ff.

cases is a matter of articulating what I sense, and therefore of getting a more articulated view of the matter. It is success in this effort that I want to call formulation, not finding the right German word, or the correct technical term. In the translation or technical term case, it is not true to say that I don't know what I'm looking for until I find it. I can circumscribe what I want to know exactly enough to look it up in a dictionary or a handbook. But in cases of genuine formulation, we only know afterwards what we are trying to identify.

So the first thing that formulating does for me is that I can now get an articulated view of the matter, and thus focus on it properly. The second change is related to this: that I have delimited what I am concerned with, I can now draw in however rough a fashion its boundaries. These clearly go together, in that an articulated view of some matter is obviously one in which certain distinctions are drawn. The terms I apply have meaning only in contrast with others; in applying certain descriptions I make certain features salient, features which my description has now identified, hence delimited. The drawing of boundaries is essential to language; and conversely: it is only in language that we can draw this kind of boundary, through language that we can delimit what we are attending to in the matter at hand. We can say of an animal on behavioural grounds that he is attending to this feature of an array and not that, because that's what he's responding to. For example, we can say: he's responding to the shape, not the colour. But the animal can't make the distinction between attending to the shape and attending to the colour, as we must be able to follow the instruction 'don't mind the shape, look at the colour', to focus on one rather than the other.

Making the distinction here, where you grasp each by defining it contrastively with the other, is something only a linguistic creature can do. And it is one of the main offices of language to delimit, make boundaries, so that some features can be picked out, not just in the sense that we respond to them oblivious of the others, but that we pick them out from the field of others.

The terms of language are inherently contractive, as Spinoza and Hegel argued. Which is why language is a capacity to apply a web of terms, and never the ability just to use a single term. A one-word lexicon is an impossibility, as Herder and Wittgenstein have both argued. It is language which enables us to draw boundaries, to pick some things out in contrast to others.

Thus through language we formulate things, and thus come to have an articulated view of the world. We become conscious of

things, in one very common sense of this term, i.e. we come to have explicit awareness of things.

2. Second, language serves to place some matter out in the open between interlocutors. One might say that language enables our putting things in public space. That something emerges into what I want to call public space means that it is no longer just a matter for me, or for you, or for both of us severally, but is now something for us, i.e. for us together.

Let's say that you and I are strangers travelling together through some southern country. It is terribly hot, the atmosphere is stifling. I turn to you and say: 'Whew, it's hot'. This doesn't tell you anything you didn't know; neither that it's hot, nor that I suffer from the heat. Both these facts were plain to you before. Nor were they beyond your power to formulate; you probably already had formulated them.

What the expression has done here is to create a rapport between us, the kind of thing which comes about when we do what we call striking up a conversation. Previously I knew that you were hot, and you knew that I was hot, and I knew that you must know that I knew that . . . etc.: up to about any level that you care to chase it. But now it's out there as a fact between *us* that it's stifling in here. Language creates what one might call a public space, or a common vantage point from which we survey the world together.

To talk about this kind of conversation in terms of communication can be to miss the point. For what transpires here is not the communication of certain information. This is a mistaken view; but not because the recipient already has the information. Nothing stops A making a communication to B of information already in B's possession. It may be pointless, or misguided, or based on a mistake; but it's perfectly feasible. What is really wrong with the account in terms of communication is that it generally fails to recognize public space. It deems all states of knowledge and belief to be states of individual knowers and believers. Communication is then the transmittal, or attempted transmittal of such states.¹

But the crucial, and highly obtrusive fact about language, and human symbolic communication in general, is that it serves to found public space, that is, to place certain matters before *us*. This blindness to the public is of course (in part anyway) another consequence of the epistemological tradition, which privileges a reconstruction of knowledge as a property of the critical

¹ The Gricean account too ultimately makes this same mistake. Cf. my review of Jonathan Bennett's *Linguistic Behaviour*. *Dialogue*, June 1980.

individual. It makes us take the monological observer's standpoint not just as a norm, but somehow as the way things really are with the subject. And this is catastrophically wrong.

This is therefore another crucial feature about formulation in language. It creates the peculiarly human kind of rapport, of being together, that we are in conversation together. To express something, to formulate it, can be not only to get it in articulate focus, but also to place it in public space, and thus to bring us together qua participants in a common act of focusing.

Of course, given this human capacity to found public space, we can and do ring all sorts of changes on it. There is a whole variety of conversations, from the deepest and most intimate to the most stand-offish and formalized. Think of a heart-to-heart talk with a lover or old friend, versus casual chatter at a cocktail-party. But even in the latter case, what is set up is a certain coming together in a common act of focus. The matter talked about is no longer just for me or for you, but for *us*. This doesn't prevent us from putting severe limits on how much will be in the common realm. In the cocktail-party context, by tacit but common consent, what will be focused on are only rather external matters, not what touches us most deeply. The togetherness is superficial.

In another dimension, we can distinguish various kinds of public space, all the way from small conversations (here including both the heart-to-heart and the cocktail-party chat) on one hand, to the formal public space established in institutions on the other: discussions in Parliament, or on the media, or in convocation. These various kinds of institutional or pan-societal public spaces are, of course, a very important part of the dispensation of human life. You can't understand how human society works at all, I should like to maintain, unless you have some notion of public space.¹

3. Language thus serves to articulate, and to found public space. But thirdly it also provides the medium through which some of our most important concerns, the characteristically human concerns, can impinge on us at all.

Some of the things I can formulate are such that I could attribute some pre-articulate sense of them to animals. And the

¹ The usual use of this term 'public space' is to refer to the institutional, societal manifestations. I am extending it to conversations, and everything in between, because I want to stress that the same human power of bringing us together in a common focus through speech is at work in these other contexts. And that the public space of our political discussions, what we refer to for instance when we say that such and such a fact is 'in the public domain', constitute a special case—albeit a crucial one—of this general capacity.

same goes for some of the matters I can place in public space. It's being hot in here is an example for both of these. But there are other thoughts which it wouldn't make sense to attribute to an animal even pre-articulately.

Among these, of course, are thoughts of a high degree of complexity, or those involving theoretical understanding, e.g. thoughts about the molecular constitution of some objects. And as well thoughts on a meta-linguistic level, in a very broad sense of this term, i.e. thoughts about the properties of those symbolic systems in which we think, are out of bounds. Animals can't be said to entertain propositions of number theory, even the simplest.

But I'm thinking of certain concerns which couldn't conceivably be concerns of a non-linguistic animal. We can take the well-known example, the contrast between anger and indignation. Anger we can attribute to (some) animals, at least in some sense. But indignation not—at least if we leave aside our anthropomorphic indulgence for our pets.

The difference is that we can only ascribe indignation to a being with something like the thought: this person has done an injustice. One is only indignant at a wrong-doer (or believed wrong-doer). One can be angry at anyone who is provoking, even innocently, even though he is in the right, and you are in the wrong (especially so).

But what are the conditions for some agent's having a thought like that? It must be that he can make discriminations of the form right/wrong, as against just advantageous/disadvantageous, or hurting me/helping me. But this requires that the agent have some notion of standards that hold of a given domain; here it's a matter of moral standards, which hold of human actions. And by this I mean that he must be aware of these standards, recognize that there are standards.

For many living things can be said to 'apply standards' in some loose sense: the cat turns up its nose at sub-standard fish, and only goes for the best. There are some standards, in the sense of criteria of acceptability, which will help explain its behaviour. There are standards here *an sich*, but not *für sich*. The cat doesn't recognize that it is applying standards, has not focused on or articulated the standards qua standards.

But that is what an agent must be doing to be considered a moral subject. There is no such thing as morality completely *an sich*. Imagine a non-linguistic animal which always behaved according to what we identify as morality, e.g. it was unimaginably benevolent. We still wouldn't call it a moral subject if it had

no sense that this action was meeting some standard, or was something that it ought to do, or had in some way a higher significance and was not simply on all fours with anything else it was inclined to do, or might be inclined to do. This is, of course, the insight that Kant elaborates from his distinction between duty and inclination. But one doesn't need to take it where Kant does, into a sharp dichotomy. Nothing rules out the spontaneously good person, one who is benevolent out of love of human beings. Only for him as a moral agent there must be some sense that acts of charity have an additional, a higher significance than other things he may be inclined to do, e.g. to eat ice cream, or feel the breeze in his hair. And indeed, this is part of our portrait of the spontaneously benevolent person, the natural philanthrope: the love for human beings that moves him incorporates a sense of their special importance, of their dignity and value. We wouldn't think of him as a naturally *good* person if the quality of his feeling for human beings, and the joy he took in *beneficence* towards them, were not quite different from his inclination to other desired ends and the pleasure he found in them. For a start, we would even be reluctant to call anyone really *beneficent* who had no sense of the dignity of his human *beneficiaries*.

But to be open to this kind of significance, to recognize for instance that some acts have a special status because they meet some standard, we have to have language. For we are not talking any more about a discrimination which is shown in, because it shapes our behaviour. The cat exhibited that. But no mere pattern of behaviour would suffice to induce us to call a given subject a moral subject. What we require is his recognition of the standards, recognition which doesn't reduce to our behaviour being controlled by them.

But to recognize in this sense, to mark the discrimination between, e.g., mere inclination and the right, or between what we love and what also calls on our benevolence and respect, we need to have articulated the domain of actions and ends or at least to have marked the relevant discrimination through expressive behaviour, e.g. through ritual, gesture, or the style of comportment. A creature incapable even of expressive behaviour could never be said to distinguish right and wrong. By this, I don't just mean that we as observers would lack the evidence we need to say this of him. Rather I want to claim that the very notion of an agent recognizing standards which are neither articulated nor acknowledged anywhere in expressive activity makes no sense. In what could this recognition consist?

What would make it, even for the creature himself, a recognition of *right* and *wrong*?

Thus, taking 'language' in a broad sense to include expressive activity, we can say that only language animals can be sensitive to standards qua standards. And hence only linguistic animals can have this kind of concern, for moral right and wrong. But something similar can be said for the whole range of concerns that we consider characteristically human. For instance a being can only feel shame who is aware of some demands which are laid on him in virtue of his being an agent among others. The same goes for someone who is capable of a sense of dignity, or a sense of pride, of an aspiration to fulfilment, to integrity, and so on.

We are by no means talking only of admirable concerns. Some that we may consider petty or even despicable partake of this essentially linguistic nature. Animals couldn't aspire to machismo, any more than they could to sanctity or wisdom. For contained in the notion of the macho is that a man have a sense of the confidence, power, swaggering self-assertion that is proper to masculinity. There are standards here too; and that is why contempt awaits the weakling, the one who is 'like a woman'.

Thus man is a language animal, not just because he can formulate things and make representations, and thus think of matters and calculate which animals cannot; but also because what we consider the essentially human concerns are disclosed only in language, and can only be the concerns of a language animal.

III

Thus there are three things that get done in language: making articulations, and hence bringing about explicit awareness; putting things in public space, thereby constituting public space; and making the discriminations which are foundational to human concerns, and hence opening us to these concerns. These are functions for which language seems indispensable.

If we examine these functions, three points seem to emerge which are relevant to a theory of meaning, of which I'd like to discuss two at some length here.

1. The first concerns the role of what one could call expression. Language not only articulates, it also expresses. And this plays an essential part in the second and third functions above (and an indirect role even in the first). Concerning the latter two functions, we could put it this way: language doesn't have to be used to describe or characterize things in order to fulfil them. I strike up a

rapport with someone. I can do this by opening a conversation. My opening gambit may be: 'nice weather we've been having lately'; which is an assertion about recent meteorological conditions. But the content of my assertion may be secondary to the enterprise. And frequently we may strike up a rapport without an assertion, or a question, or a command, or any use of the characterizing, representing function at all.

Think again of the case where I turn to my neighbour in the hot train carriage; and instead of saying, 'Whew, it's hot in here', I just smile, look towards him, and say 'Whew!', wiping my brow. This can establish a rapport, which phase will indeed, normally be followed by usual conversation; but might not be—let's say we have no language in common.

But even in this case, where we can't have any conversation in the normal sense, we have created a rapport which is typically that of language animals. That is, we are now experiencing this heat/discomfort together; this matter of the stifling heat is not just one for you and for me severally, it is now for *us*. Or to use my above jargon, this matter of the heat/discomfort is now in a public space between us, which I have set up by my expression and gesture.

Here we have an expressive use of signs, which is unconnected with a characterizing or representative use. There is no depiction in my whole utterance, which combines speech and gesture. Even my mopping my brow is not a depiction. I really need to wipe the perspiration. What I do is lay it on thick, I mop ostentatiously. That is in the nature of this kind of expressive sign. But I really mop.

This ostentation is what makes my brow-wiping part of a sign, an expression. And it is this expression which puts the matter of the heat/discomfort into public space between us. Expression discloses here; not in the sense that it makes known to you my discomfort; you were well aware of that from the beginning. Rather it discloses in the sense of putting this in a public space, that of our rapport. That is, the discomfort is now an object for us together, that we attend to jointly. We enjoy now a complicity. This is an experience that we now share. Thanks to this expression, there is now something *entre nous*.

Thus expression reveals, not in the ordinary way of making something visible, as you could do by removing some obstacles to vision. We have a sense that to express something is to put it 'out there', to have it out before us, to be 'up front' about it. All these images point to the notion that expressing something is revealing it, is making it visible, something out there before us. But on

reflection, we can see that this space before us is the public space of what is *entre nous*. The space of things which are objects for us together.

We completely miss this point if we remain with the monological model of the subject, and think of all states of awareness, knowledge, belief, attending to, as ultimately explicable as states of individuals. So that our being aware of X is always analyzable without remainder into my being aware of X and your being aware of X. The first person plural is seen here as an abbreviated invocation of a truth-functional connective.

What I am arguing here is that this analysis is terribly mistaken; that it misses the crucial distinction between what is *entre nous* and what is not. It makes us think of cases of being 'up front', of avowal, as being of this sort: I impart information to you about myself; of I give you further warrant to believe some information (you may already have suspected) by asserting it before you. But the case I've been discussing shows how much is left out here. In the train, you can't lack the information that I'm hot, and you need no further warrant for it. Yet some kind of revelation is brought about by my expression. It is the revelation into public space, and it is this which has no place in the monological model.

So there is an expressive dimension of the signs we deploy, which is so far from being reducible to the representative dimension that it can sometimes exist without it; and this expressive dimension plays an important role in establishing the kind of rapport which is peculiar to us linguistic animals, and which I have referred to with the terms 'public space' and '*entre nous*'.

But although the expressive can exist without the representative, it seems that the reverse is not the case. Certainly not in normal conversation. Even when I open up with 'nice weather we've been having' or 'Read any good books lately?', the nature of the rapport established: friendly, intimate, casual, easy; or on the contrary rather formal, cold, distant, or barely polite, or slighting, or ironical, or subtly contemptuous; all this is determined by the expressive dimension of my speech: the way I stand, look at you (or away), smile (or not), my tone of voice, manner of speaking; as also by my choice of words. I may choose between words which must be considered synonyms as far as their depictive function is concerned, but the expressive effect of each may be very different. That is, my choice of words may display a certain stance towards the subject matter, e.g. one of detached disinterest, or one of passionate involvement, or one of ironic affection, or one of

cynical schadenfreude. And at the same time it may display a stance towards you as an interlocutor; brusque and businesslike, rather formal and distant, or eager and open, etc.

I say 'display' here, because this is a matter of expression. My stance towards the subject, to you, are things that I reveal in the way expression reveals. I am making them evident in public space, and in so doing, I am shaping the kind of public space there is *entre nous*. One could say that the type of revelation here has to be expressive, because what I am revealing concerns public space. I am showing how I stand to this public space, the nature and style of my participation, and hence the kind of space it is between us. But public space is constituted by expression, and so any revelations concerning it have to be expressive.

And second, my display is a matter of expression, because I am not in any way depicting my stance in either my choice of words, or my tone, or my manner of speaking, smiling, etc. I could also say: 'this matter barely interests me', or 'talking to you is rather a chore for me', or 'our conversation is just a peripheral passtime for me while I'm at this party and there's no-one more interesting'. What is expressed can often also be articulated in a depiction. This may indeed, be one way in which I alter how I feel or how I stand, as we shall see below.

But to articulate my stance so doesn't do away with the expressive dimension. It just displaces it. These things too I should say in a certain tone, with a certain choice of words. Perhaps I have an ironic twist to my voice and words which convey that I am already taking some distance from the absurd social world in which people hold such dead conversations, and I am half inviting you to stand together with me at this vantage where we can survey the folly of men together. In which case, paradoxically, such seemingly cutting remarks could create an unaccustomed intimacy.

Can one ever do away with the expressive dimension? It would appear perhaps that this is the aim of those austere forms of language that we have developed for science, philosophy, and learned matters generally. At least the aim has been to step out of the conversational context where what presides over the choice of words is so much one's display of one's stance, or one's sense of the nature of the relationship. And philosophy itself has found that it is intermittently at war with one special class of such expressive displays, those we subsume under the heading 'rhetoric'. Rhetoric is the science of how to talk persuasively in the larger-scale, more official public spaces, those of political deliberation, or judicial argument, for instance. The rhetorician may not lie, in the sense of

knowingly offering depictions at variance with the truth. But he is still suspect to the philosopher, because it is known that the crucial thing for him is what is displayed through his words. But what is depicted is an object of more explicit awareness than what is merely displayed. The rhetorician is under suspicion, because it would appear that he doesn't care all that much how accurately things are depicted, or even if very much gets depicted clearly, as long as the display succeeds, i.e. presents himself, or the matter he deals with, in the right light in public space. As I argue in the *ekklesia*, I want you all to see me as the inspired, dedicated leader, willing to sacrifice myself; or as the long-patient, aggrieved party, and so on.

But this very concern with display can appear the cardinal sin for philosophy; for which what matters above all is the degree of correct explicit awareness of things. And so we develop the ideal of a non-rhetorical speech. This can be further refined to the notion of a mode of speech which is pure depiction, utterly undetermined by its place in a potential conversation, e.g. that it was said by X, to Y, on occasion Z, their relations being ABC, and so on. This would be a language where the only determinant of the expressions chosen would be the requirements of encoding the information to be depicted. The expressions chosen would be exclusively determined by what is to be represented, and by considerations of the most perspicuous way of encoding it.

No normal human prose approaches this ideal. The writings of scientists and learned men does indeed attain a certain austerity. They strive to abstract from the normal type of conversational context, in which we are so much concerned with self-display. But they do this by creating a special context, that of the exchange between serious thinkers dedicated above all to the truth of their depictions. Of course, the old Adam returns; one has only to think of all the special tricks of argument in which one displays oneself as more authentically a participant in this exchange than one's adversary. But this doesn't mean that there wasn't an important gain for human knowledge and rationality in developing the notion of such a context, and of the stance of disinterested search for truth that is meant to inform its participants.

To see the ideal fully realized, of depiction without expression, we have to go to artificial languages, to mathematical representations, or machine codes. But these succeed precisely because they are artificial languages, that is, they are deliberately shorn of what they would need to be languages of conversation. Their depictions thus can exist in a kind of conversational limbo, wherein alone this purity is attainable.

We have seen that we display our stance through expression, and that the expressive dimension of language is central to the second function. But it also can carry the third function. The essentially human concerns are only open to language creatures, I argued, because to be sensitive to them we have to have in some way articulated or expressed our recognition of the appropriate standards, and of the crucial discrimination they require.

Clearly it would have been too strong to demand that we have articulated them, in the sense of finding a description for them. What is required is that we be sensitive to the standards *qua* standards. And for this it may suffice that we give expression to this sensitivity, even if we have as yet no words to describe the kind of virtue or vice, good or bad, or in general the shape of the concern we have here.

Take the example of machismo above. We could easily imagine a culture in which the words 'macho', 'machismo' had not yet been coined, but in which something analogous existed. The sensitivity to the analogous ideal of manhood would be carried in their style of acting and speaking (as indeed, it is also carried among the macho today). The swagger with which I walk, the stance of domination with which I address women, my readiness to fight when my male dignity is infringed, all these mark my sensitivity to machismo-prime, the value in this analogous, pre-articulate culture.

But this is still different from the case of an animal, we are still dealing with a linguistic creature, who is capable of recognizing the standard involved. He recognizes it, because it is not just the case that it controls his behaviour, but he also gives expression to it. (And indeed, the standard itself here requires that he give expression to it: machismo requires that I act out of the proper *sense* of my maleness.)

And in fact, it is evident that there are standards expressed in people's personal style for which they have as yet no descriptive vocabulary, of which they have frequently no explicit awareness. The clipped way I talk, the way I stand, ready at any minute to spring into action, the distance I stand from any conversation, display what I admire and want to be taken for: the man of action, whose real concern is elsewhere, where the great battles are being fought. Or the exaggerated speed, obsequiousness, over-reaction to your every wish, project me as the dedicated servant.

This appears indeed, to be another context of expression from which we cannot escape, I mean the way we project ourselves in public space. And in this display is a standing expression of our

sensitivity to what we admire, and what we want to be admired for. This sensitivity can then be transformed by our articulating our concerns in descriptions. Our manner of projecting ourselves may be disrupted by our coming to see just what it is we are expressing. We become awkward, and have to find a new poise, projecting on a higher level of sophisticated awareness of the whole human game of self-presentation. But the articulation in descriptions can never displace the display through expression altogether.

As in the second function, so in the third. Language operates by expression as well as description. And in some sense, the expressive dimension seems to be the more fundamental: in that it appears that we can never be without it, whereas it can function alone, in establishing public space, and grounding our sensitivity to the properly human concerns.

Looking at the expressive dimension, and its role in these functions, gives us another view of the phenomena of language, and their boundaries. If we focus on representation, it will appear that prose speech, and the information-bearing uses of language in general, together with other media of depiction, form a domain quite distinct from the expressive uses of language and other expressive activities, like gesture, stance, not to speak of expression through other media, like art for instance. We might think that the principles of explanation are quite different in these two domains. And certainly this must be so, if language is primarily to be understood as representation. Then clearly, the account of language will differ from the account of these expressive activities. This leads to a rather narrow circumscription of the phenomena we wish to account for in terms of meaning.

But if we follow the insights of the HHH view, and see the importance of expression, and also its intrication into our depictive uses of language, this narrow circumscription will be more difficult to sustain. We then get a much broader view of the phenomena of language, the phenomena which a general theory of meaning must cast light on. Language, in the sense of prose speech, is not seen on its own, or together only with other media of depiction. It is part of a wide gamut, along with expressive gesture, and different media of art: the whole gamut of what Cassirer called the 'symbolic forms'. This wider circumscription is typical of the Romantic view, the family of theories descended from the HHH.

2. The second point which emerges is that all three functions involve in different ways disclosure, a making of things plain.

Articulating something makes it evident in making it an object of explicit awareness; articulating it in conversation discloses it in the sense of putting it in public space; while the articulations foundational to our human concerns disclose in the sense of making it possible for these to be our concerns at all. Hence it is easy to group them together, as Heidegger does under this one term—my ‘disclosure’ translates his ‘Erschlossenheit’—and expressions which similarly evoke images of bringing to the light, bringing into a clearing—like his ‘Lichtung’.

3. But the third point, which I want to examine at a little greater length, is what I want to call the constitutive dimension of language. Language doesn’t only serve to describe or represent things. Rather there are some phenomena, central to human life, which are partly constituted by language. Thus the kind of explicit awareness which we call consciousness in the full sense is constituted by our articulations. The public space between us is founded on and shaped by our language; the fact that there is such a thing is due to our being language animals. And our typically human concerns only exist through articulation and expression.

This means that articulations are part of certain of the crucial phenomena of human life, as becomes evident when we examine them more closely. Thus the nature of some of our feelings, those which touch the essentially human concerns, is partly shaped by the way we articulate them. The descriptions we feel inclined to offer of ourselves are not simply external to the reality described, leaving it unchanged, but rather constitutive of it.

Thus when we come to articulate a feeling in a new way, it frequently is true to say that the feeling also changes. Let’s say that I’m confused over my feelings for X; then I come to a clarification where I see that while I disapprove of some things I admire some quality in him; or after being confused about my feelings for Y, I come to see it as a kind of fascination, and not the sort of love on which companionship can be built. In both these cases, the change in descriptions is inseparable from an alteration in the feeling. We want to say that the feelings themselves are clearer, less fluctuating, have steadier boundaries. And these epistemic predicates have application here because the self-understanding is constitutive of the feeling. And this shouldn’t surprise us, because these are feelings which touch on those concerns which are essentially articulated.

All this, of course, says nothing about the causal order underlying the change. It may not be, for instance, that we simply come to a better understanding and therefore our feelings change.

It is just that one change is essentially linked to the other, because self-understanding is constitutive of feeling. Nor does it follow that our feelings can be shaped at will by the descriptions we offer. Feelings are rather shaped by the descriptions that seem to us adequate. The formulations we offer of our concerns are put forward in an attempt to get it right, and it is implicit in our practice that we recognize a more or less accurate here. That is, we recognize that self-descriptions can be more or less clairvoyant, or deluded, or blind, or deep, or shallow, and so on. To say that self-description is constitutive of feeling is to say that these epistemic descriptions can be aptly transferred to the feelings themselves. Our feelings can be shallow, or self-delusive, for instance.

Or again, let us say that I feel very guilty about a practice, and then I later come to hold that there is nothing wrong with it. The quality of the feeling of guilt changes. It may disappear altogether. But if it remains, it is very different from the very fact that now I understand it as a kind of residual reflex from my upbringing. I no longer accord it the same status, that of reflecting an unfortunate moral truth about me.

It follows from all this of course, that people with very different cultural vocabularies have quite different kinds of feelings, aspirations, sensibilities, experience different moral and other demands, and so on.

But it is not only our feelings which are partly constituted by our self-descriptions. So also are our relations, the kinds of footings we can be on with each other. These too notoriously vary from culture to culture. There are forms of hierarchy and distance which are important in some societies and absent in others; there are modes of equality which are essential to others, which are unknown elsewhere. There are modes of friendship peculiar to some societies. And each society has its gamut of possible interpersonal relations, different nuances of familiarity, intimacy, or distance, which form a gamut of possibilities which may be unrepeatable elsewhere.

Now these footings are constituted in and by language. This is not to say that they are not shaped by relations of power, property, etc. On the contrary; the point is that relations of power and property themselves are not possible without language; they are essentially realized in language. Language is essential because these different footings represent in fact different shapes of the public spaces established between people; and these spaces are maintained by language.

In the case of some of the more face-to-face spaces, the shape

may be set with a minimum of explicit articulation. Its articulation may lie in modes of address, for instance, or in the style of speech used. In very differentiated societies, like traditional Japan, one addressed different qualities of people in different dialects. But even here, and a fortiori in the larger-scale and more official public spaces, the essential discrimination will be carried by explicit taxonomies: through the naming of different classes and ranks, titles, as well as rules setting out the rights of different classes, etc.

The point could be made again in this form: the maintenance of these different footings, of hierarchy and subordination, or equality, of intimacy, familiarity, distance, requires some degree of common understanding by the potential participants. But among human beings, common understanding is brought about and maintained in language as a general rule. This is not to say that there is not tacit, unspoken common understanding between people. But it is necessarily interstitial. It exists within a framework of what is expressed. Without language at all, we couldn't have what we describe as common understanding. And indeed, much of what we call tacit common understanding is directly dependent on language. We call it tacit because the content of the understanding is not overtly formulated, but it may be expressed in such things as mode of address, choice of words, degree of volubility and so on, by which we display the common recognition of the footing we are on with each other.

And as with feelings, so here; the degree and manner of the articulation is an essential determinant of the nature of the relation. If some aspects of the footing people are on becomes explicitly formulated for the participants, the nature of the relationship will be altered. By the same token some kinds of social relations would be impossible without a certain degree of explicit articulation.

To take an example, which has been very important to us politically, the type of regime which has come down to us from the Greek polis, and to some extent also the Roman republic, where there is a fundamental equality between the citizens qua citizens, equality which is essential to their conception of self-rule and a free people. This type of regime is impossible without there being some formulation of the demand of equality, without this becoming a term of assessment, held to apply to certain societies, or in certain contexts, and not others. We could imagine certain kinds of primitive societies where what we could call equality could exist unformulated, but not for example a Greek polis, where equality

was bound up with the norms for who should rule and how, and where it thus had to be recognized in some form as a norm.

Thus the Spartans describing themselves as the Equals, the norm of *isēgoria* in democracies, the battle around *isonomia*, and the like; these are not accessory features which we could imagine having been quite absent while those societies remained essentially what they were. The self-description as equals is an essential part of this regime, i.e. of this relation of equality, and this because the regime requires a degree of explicit common understanding which is impossible without the self-description.

The above are examples of what I wanted to call the constitutive dimension of language. We see ways in which the language we use enters into, is an essential part of, our feelings, our goals, our social relations and practices. The aspect of language which is so essential may be purely an expressive aspect in some cases, such as when modes of address are what carry the burden of marking the different kinds of footing. But it may also be that what is essential to a given feeling or relation is certain descriptions. This we see with the case of the polis. Self-description as equals is essential to the regime. And this not in virtue of some merely casual condition, as one might say that relative isolation, or an intra-structure of slave labour were essential to these regimes. Rather the point is that this kind of practice of equality essentially requires the explicit recognition of equality. It wouldn't be classifiable as this practice without that recognition, just as the benevolent creature above couldn't be classified as a moral agent without the recognition of the standards his action followed.

And so, to sum up my three points, the HHH view shows us language as the locus of different kinds of disclosure. It makes us aware of the expressive dimension and its importance. And it allows us to identify a constitutive dimension, a way in which language doesn't only represent, but enters into some of the realities it is 'about'. What does all this bode for theories of meaning?

IV

Are these insights bad news for theories of meaning which focus on representation as the basic phenomenon to be explained? It might appear so at first blush, because the striking thing in the above exploration of the HHH is that it turns up two important aspects, or dimensions of meaning which are irreducible to representation: the expressive and the constitutive.

But on further reflection, it might be thought to pose no problem to something like a truth-functional theory of meaning. The very image of a 'dimension' which I have been using seems to show the way out. A truth-functional theory might be thought to be coping with one dimension of meaning, giving an account of how meaningful utterances are generated which represent the world and the situation of the speakers. It would leave the other dimensions of language to be dealt with by other theories.

Thus I say in conversation 'That was a rather effective reply'. I mean this without irony, but it is an understatement. A truth-conditional theory of sense will work out its truth-conditions, and the corresponding theorem of the theory will offer a plausible account of what I meant, because it will make sense of my behaviour in a plausible way. Presumably, together with other facts about my situation, my relation to my interlocutor, the nature of the object described, etc., it is quite likely that I should want to make an assertion in this understated mode.

There would be other theories, e.g. a theory of expression, which might help to explain how I project myself, how I display with understatement the reserve that is part of my manner of being in general, or that I feel in this relationship, or relative to this matter, or that I am projecting in order to keep a certain distance from my interlocutor. This would be a theory of expressive sense, as it were; parallel to the theory of (depictive) sense.

Then our theory of human emotions, and social relations, would cope with the constitutive dimension, by taking account of the fact that feelings, goals, footings, etc., are partly constituted by our expressions and descriptions.

Thus we might imagine a neat division of labour; and the insights of the HHH would not threaten the truth-conditional theory in any way. It would simply point to other phenomena to be dealt with by other theories. Different philosophical schools would have pioneered theories in the different domains, but neither need be threatened by the other. And it might be added, neither would be compelled to read the other's literature; and a long, audible sigh of relief rises on both sides of the Channel.

But unfortunately, this separation won't work. The t-c theorist maps the words uttered on to their putative truth conditions in such a way as to preserve plausibility of propositional attitude ascriptions. The theory of sense characterizes linguistic utterances in terms of the truth-conditions of what are identified as the incorporated representations, so that along with the forces

ascribed to the utterance, people saying something like this makes sense in the light of their situations, desires, relations to others, what they know/believe, and so on.

But this requires that we identify the putative truth-conditions independently of the target language. That is, we must have a way of formulating our own adequate grasp of the truth conditions independent of the formulations of the target language. For our coming to understand these formulations, on this view, just consists in our being able to match them systematically with the descriptions of truth conditions. Hence it is acknowledged that the language in which we formulate the right-hand side of our T-formulae must be one we already understand.

Even in the homophonic case, it can't be strictly exactly the same as the target language. The meta-language must go beyond the target language at least in this, that it reformulates a number of the formulae of the latter when giving disquoted on the right their truth conditions (or satisfaction-conditions). If in principle, nothing can be reformulated, then we have no kind of T-theory, but just an instruction: for any sentence, quote it, add 'is true iff', then repeat it disquoted.

And the difference is, of course, quite clear in the heterophonic case. In the Quinean fable of the radical interpreter, he identifies the truth-conditions in his own language, and must be able to formulate them in it, prior to understanding the target language.

Now this may work for the domain of middle size dry goods, the ordinary material objects that surround us, and are likely to be salient both to observer and native, in virtue of their similarity as human beings. Perhaps depictions of these can be understood by offering truth-conditional formulae in our language.

But when we come to our emotions, aspirations, goals, our social relations and practices, this cannot be. The reason is that these are already partly constituted by language, and you have to understand this language to understand them. One can perhaps, reformulate a description of them in some other, more theoretical language; this is the hope of all social science (and what Winch seems to be negating; if he is, wrongly). But one can only do this effectively after one has understood them in their own terms, that is, understood the language in which they are formulated for the agents concerned.

In the case of the Quine-Davidson fable, the difficulty would arise in the well-known way, that for any tribe with a way of life sufficiently different from ours, a host of words for their virtues, vices, emotions, concerns, social ranks, relations and practices,

would have no adequate translation into English. In competent works of anthropology, these terms are often left untranslated for that reason; the writer hopes to give us an idea of their meaning by showing the role they play in the life of the tribe.

But the general form of the difficulty for the t-c theory is that we cannot adequately grasp what some of the truth-conditions are without some grasp of the language. Observers from some totally despotic culture, dropped into classical Athens, we keep hearing this word 'equal', and its companion 'like' (*isos, homioios*). We know how to apply these words to sticks, stones, perhaps also houses and ships; for there is a tolerably exact translation in our home language (Persian). And we also know *a* way of applying them to human beings, e.g. physical likeness, equality of height, etc. But there is a peculiar way these Hellenes have of using the word which baffles us. Indeed, they have a pugnacious and perverse way of applying them to human beings who seem to us not at all like, some tall and some short, some of noble birth, some of base, and so on.

Now our problem is not just that we have to grasp that this is a metaphorical use. Presumably this kind of thing is not unfamiliar to us. What we have to grasp is how this word gets a metaphorical grip in politics. Maybe it isn't hard for us to see that these short, base men are refusing to be subordinate to the taller nobility. That much will be evident from all the aggressive gestures, and perhaps actual fighting which goes on.

But what we haven't yet got is the positive value of this mode of life. We don't grasp the ideal of a people of free agents, that is, in which no-one just takes orders from someone, which therefore must rule themselves, and yet which has the courage, initiative and patriotism to get it together when they have to fight for their freedom. These agents exercise their right to deliberate together about what they will do, but the right to talk doesn't make them any less effective as agents and warriors when the time comes to act.¹ We don't see, in other words, the nobility of this kind of life, or what its practitioners identify as noble, their conception of the dignity of a man residing in his being this kind of agent, having this kind of freedom.

A similar point could be made in connection with the word 'freedom'. Let us take another observer, now hostile to the polis, and pleading the case of a despotic culture. This notion of

¹ Cf. Pericles' funeral oration in Thucydides: *Peloponnesian War*, Book II, 34-6.

freedom, as a status within a certain kind of social practice of self-rule, seems utterly devoid of sense. Freedom can only mean the absence of physical obstacles, or perhaps stretching a point, the absence of legal prohibitions.¹

What our Persian observer could not see, and what Hobbes would not see, is the way in which 'equal', 'like', 'free', and such terms as 'citizen', help define a horizon of value (if I can use these Nietzschean expressions without espousing his theory). They articulate the citizen's sensitivity to the standards intrinsic to this ideal and this way of life. These articulations are constitutive of the way of life, as we saw, and therefore we can't understand it unless we understand these terms.

But reciprocally, we can't understand these terms unless we grasp what kind of sensitivity they are articulating. They cannot be understood simply on the representative model, as potential descriptions of an independent reality; predicates which can be 'satisfied' or not by certain kinds of independently existing objects. They function, true, to describe certain social conditions and relations. But these conditions and relations only exist because the agents involved recognize certain concerns, defined in a certain way; they couldn't sustain just these relations and states if they did not. But the terms are themselves essential to these concerns, under this definition, being recognized. It is through them that the horizon of concern of the agents in question is articulated in the way it has to be for just these practices, conditions, relations to exist.

Hence to understand what these terms represent, to grasp them in their representative function, we have to understand them in their articulating-constitutive function. We have to see how they can bring a horizon of concern to a certain articulation.

Thus I argued earlier that a term like 'equals' had to be articulated in the polis, because it carried this sense of mutually non-subordinated agents who are nevertheless part of the same society, who owe allegiance to the same laws and must defend them together. Equals, likes (*isoi, homoioi*), we are bound together, and yet also not hierarchically. Equals is the right term; and it had to be *articulated* in the society, because this kind of society, based on pride in this kind of ideal, could only exist if it was seen as an achievement, the avoidance of an alternative to which lesser peoples fell prey—the Persians in one context; in Pericles' exaltation of Athens, the comparison is with the Spartans. That is why there is no such society without some term like 'equals'.

But this is also the reason why there is no understanding 'equals'

¹ T. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. 21.

without seeing how it functions to articulate just this horizon of concern. This is *not* the same as seeing how it describes an independent reality, because there isn't an independent reality. Rather it is a matter of seeing how within a certain context of other concerns, and the practices in which they are pursued, the term in question could serve to articulate our concerns in just this shape and definition.

But then the whole range of terms of which this is true, and the sentences and expressions deploying them, do not seem to be fit candidates for a t-c theory of meaning. They cannot be related to truth- or satisfaction-conditions specifiable in another language, not unless that is, we already understand them and have found or coined translations. Rather to grasp their truth- or satisfaction-conditions we already have to understand them. But the kind of understanding we need for this purpose is not of them in their representative function, but rather in their articulating-constitutive function. And once we have understood them in this way, there is no further search necessary to establish their truth conditions. We have understood them fully.

In short, it is just a mistake to think that understanding these terms could consist in developing a theory which gave the truth-conditions of sentences using them. It is to misconceive their role in language; to see them on the model of an exclusively representative conception of meaning. If this kind of model were right, then t-c theories would make sense.

Imagine a human language made up of an artificial language, whose only function is to code information about an independent reality. It operates free from any conversational context; this if it exists at all must remain utterly unreflected in it. It has no expressive or constitutive dimensions. Now we can relax the picture, and imagine that human beings are using this language, but they keep their expressive function quite separate, and any constitutive uses as well. These are carried by certain noises they emit, like our purely expressive sounds: 'whew'; or by gesture, the way they walk, etc. All description is thus insulated from the expressive and constitutive. Of course, the people concerned would have to be utterly inarticulate about themselves, for they couldn't talk about those aspects of their lives which were partly constituted by expressions.

In any case, in this weird world, the descriptive language, the descriptive core, we might say, of their language, similar to our artificial language, would be susceptible to understanding in a theory of meaning of a t-c kind. But this is very far from our world.

For linguistic beings who even begin to understand themselves such a thing is inconceivable.

Nor will it do to object here that we shouldn't insist on the objective of understanding, that the notion of a t-c theory offering us a picture of what those who understand the target language understand is in the end too psychologistic, that the aim is not at all to generate understanding of sentences the same way as human speakers do, or at least that we are not concerned to give an account of the way in which they come to recognize that the truth-conditions hold. This is too 'psychologistic' an objective.

For this kind of declaration of modesty doesn't lift the above difficulty. It does no good to say that we are looking for a t-c theory which abandons the goal of matching speaker's understanding, or bringing it to light. Our problem is that we cannot identify certain crucial truth-conditions until we have gained a great deal of insight into speaker's understanding. The difficulty can't be solved by retreat, by scaling down our objectives, but only by advance, by becoming more ambitious. A t-c theory of meaning by itself isn't viable, not because it might be seen as too ambitious, but because it manifestly isn't ambitious enough.¹

The impossibility of a t-c theory can also be seen in another way. As explained by Platts,² for instance, it involves ascribing truth-conditions to utterances which along with some conception of the speech acts being performed, ends up ascribing plausible propositional attitudes to the speakers, given their desires, situations, etc. But how are we to come to an adequate understanding of their speech acts? To do this we have to have an understanding of their social practices: the way they pray, invoke gods, and spirits, curse, bless, exorcise, establish rapport, put

¹ It may seem that I'm intervening here in the McDowell-Dummett debate. But I think the point I'm making stands somewhat outside it. Because I'm not concerned with the question of how the speaker exercises his capacity for recognizing that the sentence is true or assertable. And therefore the whole question of assertability conditions, and the debate between realism and anti-realism isn't relevant to my problem. But I think in another way that there is a connection. Because I think that Dummett's intuition is right, and strikes a chord in everyone, when he argues that a truth condition theory leaves something crucial out, that it doesn't seem to give an adequate picture of language as something people understand; that there is something more to understanding than just successfully matching representations to objects. And this intuition turns out to be entirely founded. There is something vital missing in t-c theory. Cf. J. McDowell 'On the Sense and Reference of a Proper Name', *Mind*, lxxxvi (1977), 159-85, and M. Dummett, 'What is a Theory of Meaning?' in S. Gutenplan (ed.) *Mind and Language*; Oxford 1975, pp. 97-138.

² *Ways of Meaning*, pp. 58-63.

themselves on and off the different footings which are possible for them in this society, and so on. In short, to get an understanding of their speech acts is to get quite a far-reaching grasp of their social conditions and practices and relations. But to do this, as we saw, we have to get quite an understanding of a big part of their vocabulary, as well as coming to understand their expressive activity; which includes the way they may in talk about anything: sticks, stones, rivers, games, etc., express their goals, values, or relations.

It seems then that the insights of the HHH do offer reasons to lose confidence in t-c theories. And it is qua theories which see meaning entirely in terms of representation that they are so undermined. But these insights also serve to undermine the other major feature of theories in the contemporary Anglo-Saxon world: their assumption of the observer's stance.

For the type of understanding needed when we have to grasp the articulating-constitutive uses of words is not available from the stance of a fully disengaged observer. This is because, to understand the articulating use, we have to see the term within the context. This context is made up both of the horizon of concerns which is further articulated by the term in question, and also by the practices connected with them. The practices are an inseparable part of the horizon, not only because the concerns will have to do with certain practices—as in the above example, 'the equals' was bound up with the practices of ruling and being ruled, of obeying and making laws, of deciding and exercising power, and so on; but also because some concerns are most fully expressed in social practices and institutions, those precisely which lack some explicit articulation of the values involved. When this is so, the horizon of concern may be defined in the practice itself, and the pattern of right and wrong, violation and compliance which it defines. Implicit in our social practices are conceptions of the subject, and such values as freedom, individual inviolability, and so on. We in our society are less attentive to this fact, because we also have theoretical articulations of these values.¹

But this kind of context cannot be fully understood from a detached observer's standpoint. By this I don't mean that you have to be a participant in a society to understand it. But rather, two things are true: (a) to understand this kind of context, and the kind of difference the term in question could make in it, you have to understand what it would be like to be a participant.

Thus you understand the key terms to the extent that you have

¹ I have discussed this in 'Interpretation and the Sciences of Man', *Review of Metaphysics*, 25 no. 1, Sept. 1971.

some grasp on what would be the appropriate thing for a participant to do in certain situations. This is an essential condition of anything we would count as grasping some social practice; and the same point can be made about the horizon of concern. You have no grasp on the conception of honour of a foreign society, if you have no idea of what is suitable and what unsuitable, what is a bigger derogation than what, what must be done to expiate, and so on. Some degree of participant's know-how, some ability to 'call' the right responses, even if for a host of other reasons, including insufficient command of the language, you couldn't actually wade in there and participate, is an essential part of understanding.

(*b*) In addition, we only arrive at this understanding by some exchange of mutual clarification between ourselves, or some other member of our culture, and members of the target culture. An anthropologist has visited the tribe, and we are now reading his account. He is interpreting it for us in terms of our culture. But the anthropologist's understanding is arrived at not simply in his language, nor simply in the language of the target people, but in a kind of language negotiated between the anthropologist and his informants. There has to take place a kind of 'fusion of horizons' if understanding is to take place.

I believe with Gadamer that something analogous goes on in cases where there can be no living exchange with the target people, when we study past societies, for instance. In trying to understand them, we have to elaborate a language which is not simply our language of self-understanding, and certainly not theirs; but one in which the differences between us can be perspicuously stated without distortion of either one. To the extent that we fail in this, we end up judging them anachronistically, as inferior attempts at what we have attained, or equally wrongly, as inhabitants of some golden age which we have lost. Avoiding anachronism always involves being challenged enough by them to put in question our own terms of self-understanding, whether these are self-congratulatory, or self-depreciative.

Now this is incompatible with adopting what I called the detached observer's standpoint, the kind we naturally adopt towards the natural world. For this involves neither the kind of understanding mentioned above, that of a potential participant, nor does it in any way present the challenge to our self-understanding. To treat some reality as a detached observer is to treat it as the kind of thing participation in which, self-clarifying exchange with which, is either impossible or irrelevant.

But it is plainly impossible to learn a language as a detached observer. To understand a language you need to understand the social life and outlook of those who speak it. Wittgenstein put it very well: 'To imagine a language means to imagine a form of life,'¹ And you can't understand a form of life as a pure detached observer. That is what is bizarre in the Quine-Davidson fable of the observer in a foreign tribe, learning the language by matching truth-conditions to utterances. It is the companion mistake to believing that you can understand a language with a truth-conditions theory. Maybe if you could—as you can the artificial language—then maybe you wouldn't need to be in any sense a participant, or even a potential one. Maybe you could do it purely by external observation, trying to find the formulae matching utterances, situation, motivation, and so on. But the need to understand the way their language articulates their horizon and practices makes the pure observer an absurdity.

The absurdity is seen at its purest in Quine's notion that any understanding of one's person's language by another is the application of a theory. As though we could ever understand each other, if we stood to each other in the stance of observers.

This can only seem plausible because of the hold of the epistemological tradition, as I have argued above. The ideal of knowledge it proposes is that of a monological observer. By a fateful shift, this norm of knowledge is transposed into a conception of the nature of the subject of knowledge. At base we have to understand ourselves as monological observers, who have acquired the capacity to exchange information. This conception leaves no place for public space, and thus entirely blocks out one of the most significant features of human language.

If this picture were true, and each of us operated as a monological observer, then indeed we would all need theories of each other. My receiving information from you would ideally be subjected to tests for reliability. I should need a theory to assess your trustworthiness as an informant. But also, since what I receive is simply the raw data of your making noises or signs, I'd need a theory to interpret these as information.

But once we understand that language is about the creation of public space, and that public space has participants; indeed, it is just what exists between participants, making them such in the act of communication; then we can see that there cannot be a totally non-participatory learning of language. The whole idea is at base inconsistent.

¹ *Philosophical Investigations*, i. 19.

V

The insights of the HHH thus seem to put in question the basic premisses of much contemporary theories of meaning: that meaning can be treated in terms of representation, and that we can come to an understanding of language as monological observers.

But does this mean that a t-c theory, for instance, is without value? Even if we grant that learning the meaning of many words has to consist in understanding their articulating-constitutive function; and that once we have understood them in this way, we know all we can about their satisfaction conditions: even so, is there not room for a T-theory?

After all, one of the major aims of a T-theory was to show how we can derive an infinite number of sentences, which we can produce or understand as grammatical/meaningful, from a finite stock of understood terms or expressions. One of the important phenomena of language is that we are able to go on and ring an indefinite number of changes on the sentences we have already produced or heard. From the sentences 'X is black' and 'Y is white', we can go on to produce the sentence 'X is black and Y is white'. Having mastered 'He said that p', we can go on to 'She said that he said that p'.

Now the aim of T-theory could be to explain the boundless creativity of sentence-production on the basis of what we normally believe to be a finite vocabulary. And this would be matched in the theory by the ability to derive an indefinite number of theorems of the form 's is true iff p' from a finite list of axioms.

But we might object, we couldn't hope to account for our creativity in this way, or only in small part. What is most striking about linguistic inventiveness, is the coinage of new terms, of new turns of phrase, of new styles of expressing oneself, the inauguration of new extensions of old terms, the metaphorical leaps, and so on. The very assumption of the finiteness of vocabulary is questionable, since it would appear that our existing terms are full of potential extensions. To take just one example (I owe this one to Steve Holtzmann): we speak of feeding an animal; then we go on to speak of feeding a parking meter; then we speak of feeding someone's ego. There is quite a rich image here of the ego as a voracious devourer of praise and assurances.

The reply of the T-theorist would be that indeed, metaphorical extensions are another matter, but that they presuppose some grasp of the literal meaning. What a t-c theory of meaning is in business to map is the literal meanings of the terms in the

language, and the sentences built from them. And that mapping this is basic, since to understand the figured sense of any term you already have to have a grasp of its proper sense. Hence a theory of this kind, while not explaining all of linguistic creativity, would account for the essential basis of whatever it left unexplained.

And it is clear that a T-theory needs something like the notion of the 'strict and literal meaning' of the terms it explains.¹ For owing to the different stances we take in speech, e.g. irony, sarcasm, rhetorical exaggeration, understatement, and so on, it is plain that the conditions obtaining in all correct and appropriate uses of a given expression will vary wildly. If we take an assertion like 'That was a clever remark', it is clear that it can be appropriate and quite correct in one tone of voice following a clever remark, and in quite other tone of voice following a very stupid remark. If the T-theorist is going to learn to map such sentences on to their truth-conditions, he has to be able to control for these rhetorical shifts, for irony, sarcasm, etc., and this seems to require that he isolate on one hand a literal meaning of the expressions studied, and on the other that he identify the various rhetorical changes that can be rung on it.

T-theorists thus seem to have a great deal invested in the following propositions: (a) that each expression that can be used to characterize things has a literal meaning (or in the case of polysemy, meanings) along with any metaphorical or figured meanings it might have; (b) that grasping the figured meanings presupposes a grasp of the literal meaning; and (c) that observing the conditions in which speakers make their utterances, along with what we can surmise about their motivational states, beliefs, etc., should permit us to isolate this literal meaning.

The point seems to be this: the way that an expression can relate to the appropriate conditions of its utterance can be varied through all the rhetorical stances available, and also by the variety of speech acts available in the culture. Thus as we saw above, sarcasm can even reverse the appropriate conditions for applying an expression like 'clever remark'. But there must be one way of relating to conditions which is basic, which anchors the others. If we think of language as primarily for depiction, then this basic way will be depictive. The primary way that an expression relates to its truth or satisfaction conditions is as an adequate representation of these. And indeed, if there weren't such a basic way, it is hard to see how the different rhetorical stances could exist, i.e. could have the particular point they have. The whole

¹ Platts, *Ways of Meaning*, pp. 52-3.

point of my saying sarcastically 'That was a clever remark' would be lost if 'clever' didn't have the literal meaning that it does of showing intelligence and acumen. It seems that the rhetorical flourish can only exist as a flourish thanks to this primary way of relating. Let this straight relation of depiction to truth/satisfaction-conditions be called the literal meaning of an expression. Then all descriptive terms must have literal meanings.

And so we get a doctrine of the primacy of the literal, which can perhaps be summed up in this way: 1. Each expression which can be used to characterize, make assertions, questions, commands, call this for short 'descriptive' expression, has at least one literal meaning; 2. The literal meaning of an expression is determined by its role in a straight, accurate, unadorned depiction of what it applies to; 3. The literal meaning is primary, i.e. (i) grasping any figurative or non-literal sense presupposes we grasp the literal sense (ii) the other uses are defined, get their characteristic point, only in relation to the literal use.

This sounds plausible to us as a general proposition about language, and thus something you can count on in learning any language in any culture. But in fact it is parochial, culture-centric. In our civilization, which has made the accurate, dispassionate representation of things one of its central goals, a culture in which science is so important (and this we have been in different ways arguably ever since the Greeks), it comes as no surprise that there is always a proper sense, that this is to be understood in terms of description, etc. But in interpreting other cultures—and also some more or less suppressed aspects of ours which are similar to these cultures—this may lead to nonsense and distortion. I would claim that it does. It is the kind of thing that leads us to postulate absurdities like the 'pre-logical mentality'.

Let us look at alternative possible primacies. There is another very important use of language, besides describing, and that is to invoke. This is of particular importance in what we call a religious context. For instance in a ceremony the presence of a god might be invoked by a suitable form of words.

Names play an important role in invocative uses of speech. But they function here not to fix reference, but to call, to call up, to invoke. If you know the name of someone you can call him. (Wittgenstein too was trying to shake us out of our obsession with the centrality of description when he said: 'think . . . [of] the use of a person's name to call him').¹ You have some kind of power over him. That's why in certain cultures a man's real name is hidden,

¹ *Philosophical Investigations*, i. 27.

and known only to certain people. That is why knowing the names of the Gods gives one power. And that is why the name of the God of Israel was forbidden to men to pronounce.

But descriptions can also figure invocatively. The Greeks called the Pontic the Euxine Sea. They wanted to *make* it kindly. When the Portuguese explorers returned after turning the southern tip of Africa and reported the 'Cape of Storms', Henry the Navigator ordered it renamed 'Cape of Good Hope'.

But surely, we want to say, this invocative use is secondary. It was only because the Greeks knew how to apply the expression 'kindly sea' as a description that they could use it as an invocative name. It's rather like an order to the sea: 'be kindly'. Like all orders we can understand it as a propositional content joined with a command. But to understand the propositional content is to understand how language can represent. So the representative turns out to be basic after all.

Or so we tend to think. But let's work out a case of a culture where invocation is more than marginal. Let's say that we invoke the God through reciting his high deeds. Certain myths about him, as we would call them, expressed in canonical style, are central to his ritual.

All right, but then aren't these myths, as accounts of what he did, examples of speech in its representative function? In a sense, yes. But the question is whether the representative here is primary. What makes the story correct, more precisely the formulation in the recitation? That it depicts correctly certain events? Or that the words have power? It may be impossible to answer this question. In particular, the people concerned may not be able to understand the alternative. There may be nothing like a Cardinal Bellarmine or a Vienna Circle in this culture which would enable some experienced hand among shamans to say something like: 'I don't know about the truth status of these utterances, but they sure bring the crops up'.

A more correct account (which they may not have worked out; this is *our* question) might go further like this: the words are true/right because they have power, they invoke the deity, they really connect with what he is. This must mean that what they assert of him is in some sense right and appropriate. But this relation we don't really understand, and can't hope to understand. It is quite possible that the myths give accounts which look incompatible to someone from a culture where the representative is primary. But that's not a problem for us. As invocations, these recitations truly connect with the deity, they function in tandem

so to connect us; and so they're both right. They both reveal something about him.

Or there is another possibility. Certain words may be privileged because they are words of power, now not of us invoking God, but of God himself. The Qur'an (= recitation) is an example of this. The words here are special not because they fit an independent reality, but because they are the words of the creator, who made everything. But this is not to say that we have simply reversed the direction of fit, and that they offer depictions of the world in the form of commands (like the 'let there be light' of Genesis). This would allow the primacy of the representative. The relationship of these words to reality is not clear to us; all we know is that these words of power underly everything which is.

But now it looks as though we have in this domain something like a primacy of the invocative. The ultimate context in which an expression is anchored is the invocative one. Its basic, correct use is determined, that is, out of the invocative context. Its representative correctness follows from this, is derived from this. For this domain we can reverse the doctrine of the primacy of the literal—which is simply the primacy of the representative. For the key expressions here, there is a sense they have in the invocative context, not perhaps a finitely denumerable meaning, but nevertheless a meaning (this corresponds to 1. and 2.). And 3. this meaning is primary, for it (i) is presupposed in any other uses; i.e. a merely representative use, what you can say correctly about the God outside the invocative context, can only be validated by what you rightly say within it; and (ii) even what we mean by describing God correctly is unclear, and has to be determined from our knowing how to invoke him, and connect with him. For instance, it is this which determine what is contradiction, what says something profound, etc.

This seems to be valid for the sentences pronounced in the invocative context. But it is also clearly true for the key terms which are intrinsic to this domain: e.g. 'God', 'spirit', 'mana', 'baraka', and so on.

But we want to object, how about all those terms for ordinary 'profane' things that get taken up into this discourse? We say that the God lives in the heavens, or under the seas, that he took the form of a bull, and mated with the daughter of X, that he slew his enemies, ate them, and then vomited them up, and so on. Surely some form of the literal primacy thesis is true for all these; that is, we have to be familiar with skies, seas, bulls, mating, daughters, slaying, eating, vomiting, to make sense of all this. These are like

metaphorical extensions of our ordinary uses. We have to have these words in our ordinary descriptive vocabulary in order to be able to use them in the mythic recitation. In Lévy-Strauss' famous phrase, a myth is the result of *bricolage*, but the elements which are lying around to be put together surely come from the mundane world. So there must be some acquaintance of these terms in their ordinary, descriptive meaning for the myth to be comprehensible. Hence at least 3(i) is true of them.

But this confuses two things. When we come at these people with naturalistic explanation in mind (and we rarely seem to get it out of mind), we want to say something like: clearly their acquaintance with profane skies, seas, bulls, etc., was an essential part of the casual story of their developing this mythical world-outlook. That may be true; in some sense, is bound to be true. But that is quite different from the thesis that for them what we characterize as the literal sense is primary.

This would mean that they have a practice of describing bulls, etc., independent of the mythical context, possibly even prior to it, but certainly autonomous relative to it. This would mean that they identify criteria for bulls, different classifications within the class of bulls, different properties of bulls, which in no way find their rationale in the mythical stories about bulls. These profanely identified bulls, etc., are then taken up and used in the mythopoeic process.

But this may be just wrong. It may be that there is nothing significant about religiously important animals that surround them, no criteria of identification, no important discriminations of types, which doesn't have its basis in myth. For instance, the salient features of the animal may be the object of an aetiological myth (why do pigs have curly tails, why do moose have huge antlers? etc.). The manner in which the people concerned observe, classify, perceive these animals may be very thoroughly connected with the way the animals figure in myth; so that no important feature is without its mythical significance and aetiology.

When we take up our naturalistico-Marxist perspective we feel like saying things like: 'of course, the reason for the central role of the cow in their culture is not its closeness to the God, but the fact that it was the principal economic resource; the myth is rationalisation, or ideology' . . . But that's quite a different matter from understanding their language/culture. For them the invocative context is primary, not just for those special terms which figure just about only in it, but also for a whole host of others, which can indeed be used to refer to (what we identify as) profane objects,

but where these objects are seen, identified, classified in ways that dovetail with and are shaped by the mythical- invocative context.

A tribe's classification of animals for totemic purposes, or for cosmological purposes, or to define certain tabus, which serves to connect them to spirits, or cosmos, or whatever, cannot be without link to the way they see and identify members of these species that they meet. The two dovetail closely and may reciprocally mould each other in the tribe's universe of discourse, whatever the order of our naturalistic explanation.

Put in terms of the discussion of the previous section, we can say that, for instance, a totemic classification of animals will have an articulating-constitutive use for the tribal society—as 'equals' did for the polis—as well as a representative use applied to the surrounding fauna. To believe in the primacy of the literal is to hold that the latter use is primary, and that the former is derived and 'metaphorical'. In the 'literal' use, the animals are presumably identified and discriminated purely by their objective properties; the concerns, norms, relations that they help articulate qua totemic beings play no role. These only become relevant when the animal terms are taken up in the derived 'metaphorical' sense where they serve, e.g., to identify clans.

Now my point here is that this analysis in terms of literal/metaphorical meanings may be quite wide of the mark, indeed, seems thoroughly implausible. The traffic is more likely to be two-way, the articulating-constitutive use helping to shape the criteria of identification in the representative use as well as vice versa. If we wanted to put this in a thoroughly paradoxical way, we could say that the metaphorical is primary here.¹ But it would be best to say that the whole distinction literal sense/metaphorical sense can't apply to a case like this. There are not two senses of the term here, one of which deserves to be called literal. It serves no purpose to talk of a 'literal sense' here; and won't until a more rationalizing culture develops with a concern for objective description, which descriptions will in turn make a range of more 'subjective' uses stand out, as mere tropes.

It is an important step in what we see as the development of knowledge and rationality when people break free of this dependency on the invocative/constitutive, and set themselves to observe and describe for the sake of representative accuracy. This has come about over several stages of our culture. Once a culture has conceived the norm of representative accuracy, and made this

¹ As Rousseau does to make an analogous point: 'le langage figuré fut le premier à naître', *Essai sur l'origine des langues*, chap. III.

primary, then there is such a thing as the literal meaning, or such can be worked out for the first time. But exactly for that reason, it is anachronistic to look for this in a culture where the mythic- invocative is still primary. We find such people saying things like 'twins are birds',¹ or 'leopards are Christians',² which baffle us. In our bafflement, we may grope for an account in terms of the figured sense of the words. But the contrast with a primary sense is unrecognized by the people concerned, and this analysis leads us astray.

The assumption that there is such a thing as the strict and literal meaning of an expression turns out to be an ethnocentric assumption. But it is essential to a t-c theory. That is because it sets itself to match utterances qua representations to the world. It is essential to the theorist to believe that there is a representative kernel to be found in all the various speech acts. This seems plausible when one looks at assertions, questions, commands, and notes that one can abstract a propositional content, a depictive core, from each. But this procedure reaches an impasse when one comes to a culture in which invocative uses are still dominant. Invocations don't have depictive cores; they aren't all just like commands: like e.g. 'let there be light', or 'come Holy Ghost, our souls inspire'; and in many cultures they aren't like commands at all.

More generally, it is clear that developing a T-theory will not be the way we can define the meanings in any language of those descriptive expressions which are partly shaped by their invocative or constitutive uses. For the T-theory will attempt to define expressions by identifying the satisfaction conditions of their literal uses. But these do not exist. Rather we cannot hope to understand the pattern of application of expression to world in this kind of case without an understanding of its invocative/ constitutive role in the culture. If we look for its meaning to a supposedly primary, purely representative use, we will be continually baffled.

What we need to understand a language of this kind is to scrap t-c theory and cotton on to the nature of the invocative and constitutive uses in the culture under study. But to do this we have to transcend the limits of modern theory defined by the two assumptions I mentioned above: that meaning be seen in terms of representation, and that theory be from the standpoint of the monological observer. The invocative can only be understood if

¹ Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer Religion*, Oxford 1956, pp. 128-33.

² Dan Sperber, *Rethinking Symbolism*, Cambridge 1975, pp. 129 ff.

we drew on the insights of the HHH, and become cognizant of the expressive and constitutive dimensions of language.

And as a matter of fact, we can begin to understand it from our own practices which are analogous, and which writers of the HHH have discussed.

‘Think . . . how singular is the use of a person’s name to call him’ said Wittgenstein (I consider him an honorary member of the HHH).¹ You address someone, open a conversation. That brings about a public space between you. That public space is shaped, modified, made colder and more distant, or warmer and more intimate, etc., by what you say, your choice of words, your tone, manner, etc. Public space is invoked in speech. More, it can invoke qualities in us. It is a peculiar power of the saint to be able by seeing the good that we are, and naming it, to bring us closer to this good. There is a symmetrical power that some evil people have. The invocative is far from being dead in our culture. It is transposed. And above all, it is invisible to those influential self-understandings which have taken the primacy of the representative for their principle. You need the insights of the HHH to bring it to light. Once you do, then some of the seemingly bizarre beliefs of primitives, such as, e.g., that knowing my name gives power over me, seem less incomprehensible.

But we suffer from a powerful temptation to interpret ourselves in terms of representative primacy. This starts as a norm: it is essential to our scientific practice, to what we understand as the correct search for knowledge, that we set ourselves the goal of making an accurate representation of things. And this has meant shaking ourselves free from earlier views in which the demands of connection, communion, or attunement with the cosmos were still intricately intertwined with those of attaining an adequate picture of the true state of affairs. This norm is obviously justified, indeed, indispensable to our scientific culture.

But the norm has ended up being forgotten as a norm. Somehow the pressure seemed irresistible to see this picture of the subject, the disengaged observer making and testing representations, as the correct theoretical account. But nothing could be more disastrous. We cannot understand the past, and distort the present. And above all we utterly fail correctly to conceive what the *task* is that the norm prescribes. We think in some confused way that we are already really there at the point it calls us to.

The theories of meaning dominant in Anglo-Saxon philosophical culture, who share the dual premiss I have mentioned,

¹ Loc. cit.

are prime victims, I would argue, of this transposition of norm into theory, which is so typical of modern culture. That is why they can believe that a theory of meaning could be elaborated which took only account of the representative dimension.

But as a matter of fact, not only is this not the only dimension, it is in a sense not even the primary one. The first thing we need to do in understanding a language is to see the place that representation has in that culture. If it is given normative primacy, well and good. Even there, as we have seen, a purely representation-based theory will by no means suffice. All our language of individual and social self-understanding would be opaque to such a theory. We will only think it will work, if we have fallen victim to the transposition from norm to theory.

But at least our theory will have some fit with our culture. It won't at all if the culture we're studying doesn't give primacy to representation. What the nature of the culture is, what kinds of speech acts are primary, has to be established first, as it were. The Wittgensteinian slogan turns out to be completely true: to understand a language, you have to understand a form of life.

But this just takes further what I argued was the lesson already implicit in Frege's critique of early designativism. You can't understand how words relate to things until you've identified the nature of the activity in which they get related to things. Here the point is taken further and applied to those who have claimed Frege's mantle: you can't understand how sentences relate to their truth-conditions, or expressions to their satisfaction-conditions, or their assertability-conditions, until you have understood the nature of the (social) activity, the form of life, in which they get so related. The way in which they relate to the world is very different in invocative cultures than it is in representative ones. Get this straight first. Proceeding as though the representative were a quite autonomous dimension is a road to disaster, even as among your spiritual forbears proceeding as though designation were the only relation turned out to be.

This is the message of the HHH.