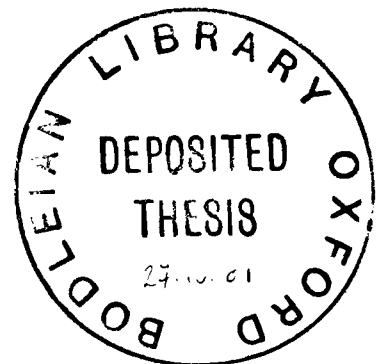


***‘Normativity, Rationality and the  
Pragmatic Turn’***

**A thesis submitted for the degree of DPhil**

**Nicolas Bellorini, St Cross College,  
Oxford  
Trinity, 2000**



*for Zia Lina*

Angela Bellorini  
1935-2000

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This work is dedicated, with love, to the memory of my aunt, Angela Bellorini, who died in the week of its completion.

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## **Abstract**

The aim of the thesis has been to understand and develop the role of a notion of normativity as a foundation stone of a proper understanding of language and meaning. In particular I have sought to defend the thesis that normativity is constitutive of the linguistic; a thesis aptly captured by Charles Taylor’s remark that to be a language user is ‘to be sensitive to irreducible issues of rightness’ (a thesis which I argue is indispensable to underwriting an appropriate epistemology of language - that we can have unreflective and unproblematic access to the meanings of our interlocutors’ words).

This I have sought to achieve primarily by confronting the challenges a recent, and overwhelmingly plausible, trend in philosophical thinking about mind and meaning poses for an intuitive understanding of their normativity. This trend I have labelled ‘the pragmatic turn’, and which I clarify in terms of certain core commitments regarding the nature of a philosophical account of language owing largely to Wittgenstein and Davidson respectively. These commitments enable the formulation of a normativity problematic with which I have concerned myself - establishing how we can retain the thought that, as language users, we are distinguished by the normativity of the competencies involved when those competencies are geared to the practical realisation of our communicative aims.

What I aim to establish is a notion of linguistic practice or speech action which (i) offers a model of communicative rationality which speaks directly to our overall concern with the normativity of language use; and (ii), is the centrepiece of a pragmatics which relates appropriately to the philosophical concern with meaning.

The main claim defended is that a notion of discursive rationality emerges from the framework of Austinian speech act theory, and, moreover, is an appropriate tool for the resolution of the identified normativity problem. I thus propose a qualified endorsement of an approach owed in large part to Habermas’s concept of communicative action.

# 1. Introduction

In this introductory chapter, I introduce the notion of normativity as central to a view of mind and meaning with considerable intuitive and historical resonance. The notion is characterised in terms of the prescriptive and evaluative dimensions that accrue to explanatory concepts of intentional action. I locate two principal applications of the notion - to rationality, that is an application to 'having reasons'; and to intentionality, that is an application to the contents of thoughts, concepts and the words that express them. In the second part of the chapter, I outline my concern specifically with the normativity of language and meaning. I describe the challenge to the view that they are constitutively normative, and give some preliminary indication of my response to it.

## I

1. A venerable and fundamental concern in philosophy has been to say something about our place in nature - something at once about what distinguishes us from, and yet enables us to affect, the natural order. The experience of a human life is after all characterised by a certain independence from this order; and yet is nevertheless virtually inconceivable other than as a way of existing within it. This suggests a duality aptly captured by Aristotle, according to whom we are 'rational animals'. According to this thought, what distinguishes us is our rationality, our susceptibility to the demands or authority of

*Reason*.<sup>1</sup> As Robert Brandom puts it, this ancient thought emphasises ‘sapience’ rather than ‘sentience’ in distinguishing ‘us’, and stresses what ‘we’ *do* rather than the stuff of which we are made.<sup>2</sup>

Pursuing this thought, what distinguishes us is that our behaviour is seen as the systematic manifestation of agency, of deliberation and intention. This is largely a matter of our behaviour’s placement in a network of reasons - that is its susceptibility to explanation in terms of what is given as a reason for it, and what it is a reason for. Rationality has traditionally been seen as the exercise of something approaching a faculty of *Reason*, e.g. practical wisdom in Aristotle, spontaneity in Kant.<sup>3</sup> Our responsiveness to ‘what reason dictates’ is typically contrasted with our animal conformity to natural laws.

What, in turn, distinguishes this reason-mongering (for example, from other forms of behaviour)? The contrast is typically and persuasively drawn in terms of *normativity*. A reason’s having normative force or significance is a matter of its contribution to determining what *ought*, rather than what *tends*, to happen. If I have a reason to make myself scarce, then, all things being equal, I ought to do so. *Whether* I will do so is another question. If I have a reason to bring it about that p (say, because I have a desire to, or because it is right to) and I believe q-ing will bring it about that p, and that I am capable of q-ing, then I ought to q. In fact, one ought to do what one has a *good* reason to

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<sup>1</sup> This leaves open the thought that we may perhaps be held to *share* consciousness and motivational drives with non-human others, i.e. a mental life in some more general sense.

<sup>2</sup> That is, in Aristotelian terms, a stress on final, as opposed to material causes. See Brandom, chapter 1.

<sup>3</sup> I use the archaic ‘Reason’ to capture this sense of our responsiveness to considerations of rationality, and which we find in everyday expressions such as ‘he listens to reason’, and ‘reason dictates or forbids ...’. Of course, talk of ‘faculties’ is dispensable, but it picturesquely captures the intuition that we are so responsive (and it carries a connotation of the objectivity of that to which we respond. See below, #7, and chapter 3).

do, since reasons justify as well as explain.<sup>4</sup> This is an important aspect of their normativity, but I shall leave discussion of that until a little later. We can for the moment say that *prima facie* one ought to do the things one has a good reason for doing (granted those things are desirable or worthwhile). Historically, and with one eye on the question of free will, this has been taken to contrast with the *kind of determination* of, for example, my reflexes, where our primary interest is in identifying some causal condition sufficient to explain actual (and counterfactual) episodes involving my reflexive responses. Reasons ‘oblige’ where natural laws (or the events that instantiate them) compel in some deterministic or stochastic sense. A traditional (Kantian) gloss on this difference in the *kind* of compulsion concerned is by appeal to the way the behaviour of an agent is mediated by their *grasp* of the requirements of reason/a rule (permitting us the notion of an *implicit* grasp on occasion), their acknowledgement of its bond over them. We might say, in this regard, that our *understanding or cognizance* of the demands placed upon us is implicated in the aetiology of *action*.

However, whatever the merits of these distinctions, the appeal to normativity should not be taken to preclude a reason’s being motivational (and implicated in some causal story). Indeed, rationality in this general sense ought to be characterised as one’s capacity to be *moved by reasons*. Reasons would have a hard job explaining action were things otherwise. As Davidson insists, there is an important difference between being describable as having a reason to act and being describable as acting *for* some particular

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<sup>4</sup> This still needs qualification. I may have good reasons to do many, potentially competing, things, so properly speaking, I ought to do what I have the *best* (or better) reason for doing. I return to this below.

reason.<sup>5</sup> The latter appears crucial to a rationalising explanation's being properly explanatory. We can, that is, imagine someone's having a particular reason to do something, doing it, and yet appeal to this reason not *explain* their doing it. For one thing, I may actually have many (or at least, more than one) reasons to do what I do, whereas the explanatory requirement is to reveal just *the reason (or reasons) for which* I acted as I did.<sup>6</sup> Rationalising behaviour is thus primarily a matter of seeing something as done *for* a particular reason.

Davidson's rapprochement between the normative and the causal notwithstanding, rationalising *explanation* is a matter of placing behaviour in a distinctively normative explanatory space; what Sellars called the 'logical space of reasons'. For example, the relation between reasons and actions performed for those reasons is understood in terms of norms of (practical) reasoning.<sup>7</sup> Quite generally, our aim is to reveal a subject's actions, intentions and thoughts as *reasonable* in the light of their beliefs and desires. (To say 'reveal' is perhaps misleading; for it is not as if, in attributing beliefs and desires as explanations of actions, it is an open question whether those we explain stand revealed as rational. To appeal to beliefs and desires is to commit to their being, broadly, rational, since it is to commit to seeing behaviour as action. I will, however, leave detailed discussion of the peculiarities of rationalising explanation until the next chapter).

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<sup>5</sup> The *locus classicus* of Davidson's views on intentional action is his 1980b. I want to remain neutral here on whether we *have* to understand this difference, and the motivational aspect generally, in causal terms.

<sup>6</sup> Of course, I may on occasion be correctly described as acting *for* several reasons - but it is no part of the explanatory 'because' we appeal to that it must always be so.

<sup>7</sup> In the case of the relation between *acting* for a reason and the reasons for it, things can be more clearly modelled on the relation of deductive consequence, viz. the propositions expressing the contents (of reasons and action statements) embodying a practical syllogism. See Davidson, *op cit*.

So, in understanding and explaining action we are guided by (non-empirical) considerations concerning the cogency and coherence of the particular patterns of practical and theoretical reasoning in which we are taken to engage, and with their intelligibility *as a part of* the larger rational economy which makes up the agent's conscious mental life. Our responsiveness to reason, as something normative, is partly a sensitivity to *general demands of good reasoning*. However, the relations between the relevant classes of items need not be strictly logical, i.e. patterned by relations of deductive consequence. Sensitivity to the 'goodness' of the material relations between the contents of mental states is a central capacity of anything properly understood as an intentional mental life - i.e. one actively involved in a real environment. For example, an ability to reason about the effects and properties of solid objects proves more characteristic of those who possess the concept 'table', than an ability to infer the presence of something from the presence of the table.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, our intentional mental life is evidently not exhausted by our powers of *explicit reasoning*, or by appeal to general principles of rationality, such as modus ponens (as normative analogues of natural laws). Think of the formation of perceptual beliefs, or the role of emotion. If normativity is fundamental, then it must be expected to be felt no less in more fluid and contingent aspects of mental life. I return to these thoughts in chapter 2.

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<sup>8</sup> This relates to the so-called 'frame problem' in AI - that is the impossibility of codifying a relevant context of consequences in the production rules that generate behaviour.

2. Quite generally, to talk of what ought to happen is to make reference to what would happen were certain *optimal* conditions to obtain. One would perform altruistic action A if one were a virtuous person. One would conclude that p if one were thinking logically, where ‘being virtuous’ and ‘thinking logically’ constitute some structure of idealised concepts. Something has normative force then if it adverts to some such *ideal*. However, one may not regard this as yielding a particularly distinctive characterisation, citing common or garden physical systems and explanations which invoke optimal conditions (in obedience to the laws of motion, for example) and thus giving the lie to any claim to distinguish such things as norms from laws on these grounds at least. The physical systems as described by strict and exceptionless laws are evidently idealisations, as are those described in terms of physical dispositions. This however fails to grasp the categorical nature of the intended contrast. The relation between actual and ideal in the physical case is that of approximation. The behaviour of a physical system is only appropriately described in terms of - i.e. is subject to - some general law in so far as it can be taken, to some degree, to be an actual *instantiation* of what the law describes. In the rational and ethical case, it makes no difference to the normative force of , say, ‘one ought to do one’s duty’ - that is *it does not impugn its applicability* - that the actual cases fall arbitrarily short of the ideal. Indeed, most obviously in the ethical case, it captures something important about ethical concepts that they retain normative significance *in the face of* the actual course of events (i.e. what people are actually disposed to do). A distinction might then be between the plainly descriptive and the *prescriptive*, for one can more easily see how the actual course of events impacts solely on, and potentially

impugns, the former. So our original contrast between determining what ought, as opposed to what tends, to happen can be comfortably retained in these terms.

This ideal or prescriptive character relates to another feature of normativity, to which I have alluded and which is again characteristic of reason and concept-mongering - that it is *evaluative*. Consequently, capturing behaviour in a network of reasons is not just another kind of explanatory task - discovering what reasons are given for it and for what it is a reason - but also an *evaluative* one. Reasons are susceptible to assessment. Thus, to talk of something in terms of reasons involves commitment to a distinction between *good and bad reasons*. So, one ought to do just what one has a *good* reason to do. To be sensitive to this distinction is to acknowledge that reasons can *justify*, make warranted, thoughts and actions. Reasons *recommend* actions, in the sense that there is something to be said for the particular actions they rationalise. Having 'good reason' thus captures the way citing reasons reveals an action as desirable or worthwhile from the agent's point of view.<sup>9</sup> As Davidson points out:

there is a certain irreducible - though somewhat anaemic - sense in which every rationalisation justifies: from the agent's point of view there was, when he acted, something to be said for the action.<sup>10</sup>

Importantly, this suggests that normativity admits of degrees; and indeed that it applies even where it ceases to be possible to offer a general characterisation of what one ought to do, think or say; that is, where it is not generally determinable what is the *best* reason

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<sup>9</sup> Of course, having 'good reason' is not exhausted by reference to an agent's desires or beliefs about an action's being worthwhile. I may have good reason to act in a way contrary to my desires and even my understanding of what is a valuable thing to do. Evidently, though, this goes beyond an interest in explaining my behaviour, i.e. in rationalisation.

<sup>10</sup> Op cit, p.9.

for what. Take deductive rationality. Here justification can be effectively codified in the form of principles of deductive rationality, such as *modus ponens*. Things slacken however as we move to inductive rationality where we are concerned with judgements of the relative strength of the evidential basis for our claims; and further still as we leave the arena of explicit *reasoning* altogether. Nevertheless, even at the perimeters of our intentional mental lives we get normative elements to the constraints on our thoughts and deeds. Our perceptual experiences, for example, no less than beliefs, place us under (albeit perspectival) obligations, that is in so far as they form part of an intentional economy, part of a potentially intelligible *point of view* (and insofar as they can be appealed to *as reasons*). Even the most thinly integrated perceptual judgement, for example involving secondary qualities ('this is green'), is fraught with implications as a potential part of an intelligible system of beliefs, despite the fact that we cannot *in general* say how experiences should impact upon such systems.<sup>11</sup> Quite generally, it is a central characteristic of reason invoking explanations - of the rationalising 'because' that this normative element remains even where it ceases to be appropriate to ask what is rationally required.

3. It is not just the general organisation of 'having reasons' - that is the exercise of *rationality* - which is normative. A similar conception of normativity has been taken to accrue to the *contents* of the things which operate as and stand in need of reasons; that is

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<sup>11</sup> Thus, I take it that this point is sensitive to the Duhem-Quine thought that such answerability cannot be punctate, i.e. apply to experiences treated singly - but rather only as part of a related set, viz. what I am calling an intelligible point of view. Famously, Quine retains talk of experience as a 'tribunal', which is an explicit acknowledgement of the normativity at the heart of mentalistic concepts.

to the contents of beliefs, to concepts and the words that express them. This is the normativity that is taken to belong to our *intentionality*, to that unique feature of the way our concepts relate to the world, are directed at things and events/actions (sometimes referred to as their ‘aboutness’). So, no less than practical and theoretical inferences, and as they too contribute to a certain kind of explanation of action, our thoughts, concepts and words have to fall into intelligible patterns - again having to do not so much with the *regularity* of their employment but with their *correct* use or application.

Normativity is thus not limited to a concern with the ‘reasonableness’ of thoughts and deeds. One can see its role in the relevant concept of mindedness (intentionality) by noting that core semantic notions like truth and representation have a similarly normative dimension - constituting indices of assessment for the propriety of the uses of contents/expressions. A proposition’s being true, a belief’s being about something, are forms of *answerability* to the world.

It is customary to hear the thought that *meaning (or content) is normative*. To explain action or linguistic behaviour in terms of the deployment of concepts or grasp of language (i.e. in terms of the mastery of meaning) is to invoke the idea of an agent or speaker’s conformity to *rules*, which determine patterns of *correct* use, and against which we assess the appropriateness of their behaviour. So, just as we might inquire what rationality requires, so we might inquire what meaning requires. Here is Boghossian:

The fact that I mean something by an expression ... implies truths about how I ought to use that expression, truths about how it would be correct for me to use it.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Paul Boghossian, 1989, p.530.

The image of concepts and meaning as like rules yields a picture of how they are taken to determine what it is to obey them, what is to count as going on in the *right* way.

Accordingly, if we understand giving the meaning of a term as involving determining its reference, we must note the *normative* character of the task. For fixing the extension of a concept/term is a matter of determining just those things to which it *correctly* applies.

Here is Boghossian again:

Suppose that the expression 'green' means *green*. It follows immediately that the expression 'green' applies *correctly* only to *these* things (the green ones) and not to *those* (the non-greens).<sup>13</sup>

We can see this thought about normativity in the claim that what makes an expression or symbol system capable of *semantic* interpretation (and thus part of a language) is precisely its contribution to the determination of the *correctness* of the use of those expressions/symbols. (An example of this would be the claim that a symbol system is semantically interpretable in virtue of its truth-functionality, assuming truth to be a form of correctness).

This presents normativity as being essential to or constitutive of the linguistic realm - that being a competent language user is primarily a matter of one's sensitivity to the (determination of the) correctness or rightness of one's linguistic behaviour. It is what Charles Taylor has in mind when he says that to use language is 'to be sensitive to irreducible issues of *rightness*'.<sup>14</sup>

I shall seek to defend this thought in the face of a sustained and plausible critique of the idea of linguistic competence as involving 'rules'. But why, one may ask, should

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p.513.

<sup>14</sup> Taylor, 1995, p.84.

one want to defend it? What lies behind the claim that linguistic behaviour, like other human accomplishments, involves following rules, is really the thought that without the idea of a common or shared allegiance to concepts or language, of the mutuality of our commitments as language users, we would relinquish any right to claim to understand each other, that our linguistic behaviour is a source of knowledge about each other and, indirectly, the world. Although I have considerable sympathy with the kind of pragmatism that is suspicious of claims that knowledge of rules and shared allegiances are somehow essential to language and communication, we have to honour the epistemology that makes it seem necessary to appeal to them. My claim will be that this pragmatism notwithstanding, normativity *is* crucial to underwriting an appropriate epistemology of language, one which asserts that we can and do have direct and largely unproblematic access to the meanings of each other's words.

4. Thus far, the notion of normativity has been presented as a fundamental component of accounts of meaning and intentionality. Could anyone *deny* the essential normativity of these things?

In the *Euthyphro*, Plato raises the question of whether something is good or right in virtue of being beloved of the Gods, or whether it is something beloved of the Gods in virtue of being good or right. Is its being good a product of or a determinant of, here, an ideal moral consciousness? In other words, does something have normative force independently of our best efforts in some activity or capacity, such as our making evaluative judgements?

With this in mind, a pre-emptive strategy against the idea that notions like belief and meaning are normative might contrast *intrinsic* with *extrinsic* normativity, and concede the existence of general norms pertaining to notions of belief and meaning (e.g. one ought to maximise one's true beliefs, one ought to use expressions as one has in the past) but deny that they are themselves *intrinsically* normative notions. This might take on something of the character of the distinction between hypothetical and categorical imperatives, crediting only an uninteresting conditional normativity to the things under consideration. So, in the interests of intelligibility, or a fruitful life, if one believes  $p \ \& \ q$ , then one ought to believe  $p$ ; if you want to be understood around here, you ought to use the term 'horse' to refer to those things (horses). But there is no question of what one *ought* to believe, apply the term 'horse' to etc., *per se*.<sup>15</sup> Norms pertaining to belief and meaning apply only relative to our concerns, for example, to live fruitfully, communicate successfully, etc.

In chapter 4, I look in detail at the suggestion that meaning is not normative. Again, this might concede that there are general norms of interpretation - such as that one ought to interpret on the assumption that speakers are rational, and that their beliefs are true in the main - but deny that these constitute norms of *language*. One might equally admit that one ought to speak as one has in the past, or apply *these* words to just *those* things ('horse' to horses) - but argue that these apply conditionally, for example to those motivated by considerations of communicative ease. Injunctions to speak in this way or that, to apply this word to just those things, constitute, at best, *extrinsic* norms concerning

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<sup>15</sup> Such a view is taken by Paul Horwich.

what one ought to do in order to be understood. For example, in this vein, Bilgrami argues:

The notion of correctness is *entirely* secondary to the desire and intention to communicate without causing strain, which underlies the notion of meaning.<sup>16</sup>

The suggestion that exercises of *rationality*, concerning how one's beliefs are related, are extrinsically (or conditionally) normative is more extreme and difficult to grasp. One concern with any such view is that appeal to the interests of a fruitful life or such like offer the wrong kind of explanation of coming to believe something through reasoning, for example in accordance with modus ponens, since they fail to capture the *compulsion* under which one acts, for example, in accordance with this logical rule; that is, on the basis of its being an instance of a pattern of relations of deductive consequence. So, although one might well explain believing that p with reference to believing that p & q in terms of one's intelligibility or one's successful actions or whatever, it would fail to be an explanation of an *inference*. I return to this thought in chapter 2.

There is also a suspicion that going 'extrinsic' about norms in this way fails to offer the heralded demystification of *normativity*. If doing something 'because one ought to' is somehow problematic (metaphysically perhaps), how does it help in explaining the *normative* force of the 'ought' to introduce something else, for example something to which one is attracted, and to which one's action is related as means to an end? Take an example from ethics. If it is to be more than a contribution to a causal analysis of behaviour, what makes for the 'ought' in 'I ought to  $\psi$  if I want to be held in high regard'?

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<sup>16</sup> Bilgrami, 1993, p.136.

is surely no more or less mysterious as the ‘ought’ in ‘I ought to  $\psi$  because it is my duty’.

Going ‘extrinsic’ might then be thought to be to turn one’s back on normativity altogether, something which many would baulk at. I shall later (chapter 4) question the relevance of an intrinsic/extrinsic contrast vis a vis the normativity of meaning.

Indeed, I shall argue that one of the morals of Wittgenstein’s thinking about mind and meaning concerns making intelligible the taking of some middle ground on a *Euthyphro*-like problem of normativity. How, for example, can meaning both place normative demands over our behaviour and at the same time not transcend the communicative use of expressions?

5. The kind of contemporary philosophical controversies thrown up by talk of normativity have tended to centre on its implications for a project of ‘naturalising’ the mind and meaning.<sup>17</sup> Accordingly, this has led many to regard the challenge posed by normativity as that of developing physicalist accounts of mind which offer plausible treatments of cognitive errors of various kinds. If, that is, one’s naturalistic account can discriminate between correct and incorrect mental representations and processes, then one has dealt with normativity. However, a normativity ‘problematic’ can be discerned prior to any engagement with, for or against, such a philosophical project. This constellation of issues emerges primarily in the so-called rule-following considerations in Wittgenstein’s *Investigations* and in themes on the nature of interpretation owing to Davidson. This ‘problematic’ structures my concerns in the present work. My concern in this thesis is

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<sup>17</sup> See e.g. Millikan’s introduction to her 1993 or Fodor 1988, *passim*.

primarily with the normativity of language. The question concerns the prospects for retaining the normative character of language in the face of what I regard as an overwhelmingly plausible ‘pragmatic turn’ in our thinking, in particular about meaning. I will spend the rest of this introductory chapter giving a preliminary outline of this challenge and my response to it.

Just one caveat. This concern with language and meaning should not be thought to involve an ignoring of questions pertaining to ‘content’ more generally and to the intentionality and rationality of minds. As will become clear, the philosophical orientation I embrace finds no room for a neat separation here. That is, confronting questions of how we produce and interpret language and how we access the contents of thoughts are not separable intellectual undertakings. Understanding language and understanding thought is a seamless hermeneutic exercise. I shall have more to say about this in chapter 4. But I should add that the view I develop - particularly concerning the most basic content conferring practices - contributes to the articulation of this orientation, rather than simply reasserting it.

## II

One thing I take Wittgenstein and Davidson to share is a commitment to the view that in making thought and action intelligible, we cannot but see it within a normative explanatory space. Normativity, according to this thought, plays an essential role in the kind of intelligibility made available by talk of reasons, intentions, concepts, thoughts and

words. However, their respective contributions to discussions of normativity, and the nature of this role, differ.

6. Davidson's thinking on mind and meaning is distinguished by his conception of the task of *interpreting* the linguistic and non-linguistic behaviour of agents. Any project of interpreting behaviour - whether rationalising action, or interpreting a language - is distinguished by what he calls 'the constitutive ideal of rationality' which governs the application of concepts of intentional action. This raises a concern with how normative notions like rationality, as I am claiming, govern projects of interpretation, and with how the ideal of rationality does distinctive explanatory work. For example, Davidson's argument for mental anomalism - that rationalistic explanations, though causal, are nevertheless non-nomological - turns on the claim that there are 'disparate commitments of the mental and physical schemes'; the former being, as I understand it, distinctly normative:

There is no way psychology can avoid consideration of the nature of rationality ... It cannot be divorced from such questions as what constitutes a good argument, a valid inference, a rational plan, or a good reason for acting.<sup>18</sup>

His work on philosophy of language makes a parallel appeal to the constitutive ideal of rationality, given his holism and what he sees as the semantical primacy of the notion of truth. The essential connectedness of the speaker's utterances with the system of their beliefs leaves us with no empirically given way in to interpreting their speech acts. It is a consequence therefore of the nature of the evidence for an empirically testable theory of

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<sup>18</sup>Davidson, 1980d, p.241.

linguistic behaviour - thus a 'precondition of interpretation' - that an interpreter must resolve at the outset on attributing certain general features to the speaker's belief system (as well as formal features to their language) in common with his own. Principally, according to Davidson, these concern the general veracity of their beliefs, as well as analogous structure-forming resources within their language. This displays the necessity of seeing a subject's intentional behaviour *as* the systematic manifestation of a common rationality - their intelligibility depends upon it.

I shall be concerned in chapter 4 with how we should best understand the role normativity plays in that account as it has evolved. Despite his foundational work in characterising the irreducibly normative nature of the view of ourselves as rational agents, Davidson's views on language have come to be associated with a form of pragmatism which explicitly denies the applicability of normative notions to language and meaning.<sup>19</sup> Though normativity impinges upon our interpretive strategies taken as a whole, we can give no sense according to Davidson to the normativity of words or concepts themselves, and, consequently (though I shall not rehearse the argument here) little sense to traditional, normative, characterisations of language mastery. Part of the motivation for this development has been an acknowledgement of the manner in which practical-interpretive issues of successful *communication* impact upon our theoretical aspirations in the study of meaning. My concern in chapters 4 and 5 will be to clarify the challenge communication poses both for the theorist of meaning, and to one who seeks to retain the

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<sup>19</sup> See in particular his 1986.

idea of the normativity of meaning, much of the substance of which we owe to Wittgenstein's discussion of 'rule-following' introduced in more detail in chapter 3.

7. Turning to Wittgenstein, talk of what is 'ideal', (not to mention talk of '*Reason* ') reveals the influence of a residual Platonism upon intuitive thinking about minds and meaning. Indeed, the basic intuition about normativity is undoubtedly Platonistic, crediting as it were a certain *autonomy* to the patterns of correct behaviour traced by meaning and content from the nomological patterns which govern, as I have been putting it, what tends to happen. One issue that I focus on is how much of the intuitive idea of normativity survives the rejection of Platonism and its cognates that we find in, or inspired by, Wittgenstein's *Investigations*.<sup>20</sup>

I aim to credit Wittgenstein with a position which has normativity *surviving* the assault on Platonism, and thus avoiding collapse into what we can call a reductionist, 'pure use' account of meaning (contrary perhaps to interpretations which overburden him with the 'meaning is use' slogan).<sup>21</sup> How, in brief, does this dialectic run? The (Platonistic) idea about autonomy appears jeopardised by a quite reasonable epistemological thought - the commonsensical rejection of views which make it possible that meaning can come apart from anything that could be conveyed in behaviour. This is fundamental to Kripke's famous reading of Wittgenstein. The commonsensical thought

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<sup>20</sup> This stress on Platonism in the context of clarifying Wittgenstein's pragmatism and his concern with normativity has been stressed by others, notably McDowell, Diamond and Bilgrami.

<sup>21</sup> An example of a 'pure use' account would be dispositionalist views. They are reductionist in the sense that a theory of content/meaning is taken to determine purely *descriptive* facts concerning what people are eg. disposed to do (but they need not be naturalistic).

insists that meaning cannot transcend use; it must be ‘fully manifested’ in use. This makes it seem that there is no room for a thought which credits autonomy to what meaning ‘requires’. Is there a hope of preserving some semblance of the thought about autonomy - which is central to the picture’s remaining normative - without succumbing to the bogus epistemology of Platonism?

One can usefully characterise Wittgenstein’s positive thinking on rules as anti-intellectualist<sup>22</sup> - that rules should not be regarded simply as the mental antecedents of one’s use of an expression, as something one might cite in giving an *explanation* of use:

For just where one says “But don’t you *see* ....?” the rule is no use, it is what is explained, not what does the explaining.<sup>23</sup>

Furthermore he claims that there is a fundamental form of rule or norm which is unarticulated, inexplicit.

This contributes to a view of understanding as implicit or immanent in behaviour; as coming to rest not upon one’s internalisation of some explicit representation, but upon one’s behaviour instantiating a ‘practice’. The contrast here can be helpfully drawn by appeal to an example given by the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu.<sup>24</sup> One can contrast the understanding made available by consultation of a map representation of a terrain with the practical know-how possessed by someone who actually negotiates ‘a way through’ that terrain. The prior form of understanding allows one to consider any point in relation to every other point in the terrain, something which does not hold for the practical

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<sup>22</sup> By ‘intellectualism’ I mean a view which models the things we understand or grasp - such as the requirements of a rule - on objects of cognition or intellection.

<sup>23</sup> Wittgenstein, 1967b, #302.

<sup>24</sup> See the opening section of his 1977. The example is referred to by Taylor in ‘To follow a rule’ in his 1995.

understanding manifest in getting about the terrain, where what matters is only the familiarity of things in relation to the subject, in particular to her physical orientation.

Wittgenstein makes a strikingly similar point about understanding language:

Language is a labyrinth of paths. You approach from one side and you know your way about; you approach the same place from another side and no longer know your way about.<sup>25</sup>

The idea of understanding *despite* this incompletely represented knowledge is characteristic of Wittgenstein's anti-intellectualism. The point would be that understanding must come to rest on something other than *explicit* reasons or justifications, that 'going on in the right way' doesn't require that one has convincingly sealed up the past with reasons (i.e. rationalised a route), as if for understanding we had to 'rule out' every possible *misunderstanding*. Wittgenstein, quite persuasively as we shall see later, just doesn't see the determination of correct behaviour like that.

Secondly, the example brings out the way understanding can be seen to rest, alternatively, upon its embodiment in practical action - thus rejecting the traditional (and Platonistic) order of explanation running from rules to their uses (as applications). The characteristic shift here concerns the connection between the understanding subject and the embodied, situated agent immersed in the public world of language.

There is of course a danger that Wittgenstein's talk of *practices* and his anti-intellectualism generally are construed as quite congenial to descriptivist 'use' theories. Indeed it is hard to deny that one of the pictures Wittgenstein sets his thought about practices against is precisely the thought that meaning and understanding are to be

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<sup>25</sup> 1958b, #203.

modelled on the case of acting for a reason. Therefore, a big question concerns how the pragmatic shift he inaugurates might be fashioned into a genuinely normative picture of meaning. As Kripke's sceptic tells us, the shift to an emphasis upon the 'manifesting behaviour' in itself merely reproduces the crucial normative question. If the Wittgensteinian move from intellectualism to the model of practical action is to be endorsed it has to avoid collapsing into a mere description of what people tend to do, thus making room for normativity. Kripke and Wright's interpretations of Wittgenstein, which I discuss at length in chapter 3, have the judgements of the community supplying what descriptive facts about individuals lack - the required normative force of ascriptions of meaning. However, the 'community view' appears itself to be ultimately reductionist, the normative being explained in terms of brute regularities in communal assessment, there being for the community 'no authority, so no standard to meet'.<sup>26</sup> So talk of 'practices' should not then be thought as offering non-normative materials out of which we can reconstruct the demands of reason/meaning, but rather should constitute a level from which those demands are already ineliminably in view.

8. Chapters 2 to 4 work to establish the normativity problematic with which I attempt to deal - preserving the essentially normative character of meaning whilst acknowledging the need for a pragmatic turn in our thinking about language. The normativity thesis I seek to retain is that normativity is *constitutive* of the linguistic dimension and thus that as language users we are distinguished by the normativity of the competencies involved.

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<sup>26</sup> Wright, 1980, p.220.

Recall Taylor's remark that to be a language user is 'to be sensitive to irreducible issues of rightness'. This is what I want to defend.

The key elements of the pragmatic turn are;

- (i) the anti-Platonism associated with Wittgenstein, specifically the commitment to the model of understanding or 'rule following' as involving one's implicit grasp in practice, rather than the accessing of explicit formulable or mentally encoded rules/interpretations;
- (ii) a specifically linguistic thesis involving the rejection of the idea of a language as an expressive resource available independently of our *communicative* practices.

How, in other words, can we retain the thought that, as language users, we are distinguished by the normativity of the competencies involved when those competencies are geared to the practical realisation of our communicative aims?

Chapters 5 to 7 work towards a solution to our problem. What I aim to establish is a notion of linguistic practice or speech action which;

- (i) offers a model of communicative rationality which speaks directly to our overall concern with the normativity of language use;
- (ii) is the centrepiece of a pragmatics which relates appropriately to a philosophical concern with meaning.

The first part of this involves identifying an appropriate framework for discussing communicative language use. I raise the question of how language use is treated in the principal semantic traditions, in order to clarify the challenge communication poses for theorists of language. I argue that neither formal semantics nor the communication-

intention theory associated with Grice meet the following desiderata: to acknowledge the centrality of communication to an account of meaning; to have the account of communication reflect upon a distinctly linguistic competence. Meeting both, I claim, is necessary to underwrite an appropriate epistemology of language which maintains that understanding speech is a largely unreflective capacity.

I argue that the framework of Austinian speech act theory, and in particular the concept of illocutionary speech action, offers a model of communicative language use which addresses our desiderata - illocutionary acts being both communicative in their nature and distinctly linguistic. Accordingly, I argue for a notion of utterance *force* which applies to speakers *qua speakers*.

Turning in chapter 6 to semantics, I claim that inferentialism as a general orientation dovetails satisfyingly with both the pragmatism and with the retention of normativity I have sought to motivate. Quite generally, inferentialism as a semantic strategy seeks to impose the priority of a certain kind of rationality over intentionality. This is a priority I endorse. I then introduce Brandom's specific version of inferentialism and his normative-pragmatic model of *discursive* practice - the key idea being that the most basic content-conferring practices are those concerned with the giving and asking for *reasons*. I then look to forge a link between this and distinctly communicative speech acts.

In the final chapter, the main claim defended is that a notion of communicative rationality - realised in an account of discursive practice which avails itself of the concept of illocutionary acts - is an appropriate tool for the resolution of the identified normativity

problem. Drawing on the merits of the concept of illocutionary acts introduced in chapter 5, the connection between inferentialism and communication is examined in terms of a theory of speech acts developed by Habermas. This has at its heart a version of inferentialism - which he describes as ‘validity theoretic’ expressly suited to the determination of the kind of communicative speech acts which reflect a distinctly linguistic competence. I propose a qualified endorsement of a Habermasian approach.

9. The demarcational strategy with which I began the discussion of normativity is not accidental or merely historical. We are the kinds of thing which say ‘we’, and counting something as one of *us* proves to be central to normativity.<sup>27</sup> Being susceptible to assessment is part of this, i.e. being *taken to be* subject to norms of various kinds. But it is also a matter of commitment to stressing a certain dimension of rationality which is often neglected by cognitivist models which stress monological, means-end, strategic rationality. This involves a certain thought about the function of rationality, specifically its role in communication (and has historical origins in the Greek concept of *logos*). This Socratic thought makes much of a connection between rationality and language or speech, being the primary means by which thought is brought to *expression*, and thus made susceptible to assessment. That is, it involves making explicit conceptual commitments in the form of *claims*; a form, moreover, in which reasons can be given, for and against them. This insight stresses the *discursive* character of the most basic, content-conferring practices. They are those bound up in processes of argumentation (not merely reasoning,

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<sup>27</sup> This is a central thought for Brandom, 1994.

but the challenging and redeeming of *claims*). My suggestion for the resolution of the problems generated by normativity (in chapters 6 and 7) develops both these thoughts.

## 2.

1. In this chapter I seek to elaborate the role of normativity as fundamental to an account of mindedness, mainly through a discussion of Davidson's arguments for the anomalism of the mental. In particular I clarify how appeal to the 'constitutive ideal of rationality' grounds the thought that there is distinctive explanatory work made available by concepts such as belief, intention and action. I suggest that what is important about Davidson's thought here is not so much his argument that there cannot be strict laws involving the relevant terms - an argument that, if successful, would apply to any so-called special science - but the distinctive anomalism that emerges from the role of normativity in rationalistic explanations. Moreover, I argue against the temptation to place too heavy a burden on the notion of norms or principles of rationality, as non-nomological counterparts of natural laws, in the articulation of anomalism. I conclude that a characteristic parochiality of rationalistic explanation poses no threat to the distinctive normativity of the mental, once we acknowledge the critical-evaluative character of such explanations.

2. The principle of the anomalism of the mental is introduced by Davidson as a premise in the argument for his version of the identity thesis, anomalous monism. The principle states that 'there are no strict deterministic laws on the basis of which mental events can

be predicted and explained'.<sup>1</sup> Stated as barely as this, such a principle appears as a (particularly confident) expression of a non-reductionist view of psychology. However, the argument for anomalism works to bring *a priori* considerations against reductionism it is the result of an inquiry into the nature of mental concepts and their conditions of application and not the result of investigation into the results of psychological theorising. In other words, the argument seeks to establish that there *cannot* be such laws.

The dialectic is straightforward. First, the relevant sense of 'mental' is 'intentional', that is as described in terms of the propositional attitudes. Second, the intentional is governed by constitutive principles of rationality which have, third, 'no echo in physical theory'.<sup>2</sup> My overriding concern is with the sense in which *normativity* grounds this 'no echo' claim.

Davidson's argument for the anomalism of the mental is contained in a set of considerations spread out across a number of related papers. However, a skeletal argument can be elicited:

1. There cannot be strict psychological laws.
2. There cannot be strict psychophysical laws.
3. So, no strict law subsumes a mental event (in virtue of satisfying a mental description).
4. So, there cannot be strict laws which explain/predict mental events.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Davidson, 1980c, p.208.

<sup>2</sup> Davidson, 1980d, p.231.

<sup>3</sup> This sketch of Davidson's arguments is rough, and culled from Brian McLaughlin's painstakingly detailed examination of the arguments. See his 1985.

First, and briefly, there cannot be strict *psychological* laws because of the heteronomicity of (intentional) psychology. This is to say, technically, that the clauses required to make the generalisations of psychology as explicit and exceptionless as possible cannot be stated in the language of psychology (or a theory which reduces (contains) the language of psychology). In this sense, many, if not all, special sciences would be heteronomic and their laws non-strict. Second, and most prominently, there cannot be strict *psychophysical* laws (those relating events under both physical - or neurological - and mental descriptions, eg. 'x believes that p iff. x is in brain state C') because of the 'disparate commitments' which govern the application of mental and physical concepts respectively, and which thus preclude the possibility of bridge laws linking predicates. Thus no strict laws subsume mental events (under mental descriptions), and so no strict laws explain or predict them.

Having thus introduced Davidson's argument, I propose largely to ignore it as stated. This is not because I think the mental is not anomalous. Rather, it is because, as stated, it is not a particularly *interesting* thesis. Davidson's argument turns on psychophysical/psychological generalisations failing to have the status of *strict laws*. As such, this makes the distinctness of the mental come to rest upon an issue of degree of lawlikeness, something I think fails to support an interesting account of mental anomalism. Davidson's point is that this issue marks the failure of generalisations involving mental concepts to support the modal and subjunctive implications of strict laws. But the same is presumably true of biology (and geology and meteorology and all the other 'special sciences'). However, where I do think the thesis is interesting (and true)

is in *diagnosing* this distinctness - and that is in terms of the distinctive *explanatory* work done by the concepts of belief and intention. This diagnosis is revealed in his considerations ('disparate commitments') in favour of 2, that is, considerations against psychophysical laws, and elsewhere in his work on rationalising explanations. This diagnosis is crucial to articulating an interesting thesis of mental anomalism which is not tied to the issue of lawlikeness. Ultimately, then, whether normativity precludes a mind's capture in the *strict nomological net* is not my primary concern (yielding as it does a rather uninteresting 'no').

So, it is the *a priori* considerations Davidson appeals to with which I will be centrally concerned. What kind of considerations are they, and, in particular, what can be meant by Davidson's claim that the conditions of applying intentional concepts have 'no echo in physical theory'?

3. Davidson voices these considerations in several places, and the following give as good an impression as any:

There are no psychophysical laws because of the disparate commitments of the mental and physical schemes..... It is a feature of the mental that the attribution of mental phenomena must be responsible to the background of reasons, beliefs and intentions of the individual.....: the constitutive ideal of rationality partly controls each phase in the evolution of what must be an evolving theory.<sup>4</sup>

And again:

Any effort at increasing the accuracy and power of a theory of behaviour forces us to bring more and more of the whole system

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<sup>4</sup> Davidson, 1980c, p.222.

of the agent's beliefs and motives directly into account. But in inferring this system from the evidence, we necessarily impose conditions of coherence, rationality and consistency. These conditions have no echo in physical theory....<sup>5</sup>

The idea is that explanatory concepts have 'constitutive conditions' of application, and that those governing the application of mental and physical explanatory concepts are radically and fundamentally divergent. Generally these conditions are 'constitutive' in view of their contribution to determining *what it is* to be counted as a system of the relevant kind - whether an agent, an organism, physical system or whatever. Without conformity to such conditions, something would be unrecognisable as, would not *be* in the relevant sense, mental, physical or biological. For example, the description of the state of a physical system (no less than an intentional system) is subject to regulative principles, concerning for example the transitivity of concepts of physical magnitude, and governing concepts of space and time. In so far as something cannot be understood in accordance with these concepts, we lose the sense of its *physicality*. The 'constitutive conditions' of applying mental concepts, the argument goes, have no counterpart in physical theory, so the kind of correlation between mental and physical concepts which would support laws correlating mental and physical characteristics is precluded.<sup>6</sup>

The substantive Davidsonian claim regarding anomalism is then that the conditions governing concepts of belief and intention are conditions of *rationality*. In explaining action, there is no way in to a subject's intentional life save by the largely

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<sup>5</sup> Davidson, 1980d, p.231.

<sup>6</sup> Of course, it is definitive of Davidson's monism that a sharp distinction is drawn between the concepts of mental characteristics (to which constitutive conditions apply), and the things to which they apply (their token instantiations).

implicit attribution of a *rational* system of beliefs and attitudes. To explain behaviour in terms of concepts of belief, desire and intention is to thereby commit to seeing their behaviour as the actions of a rational agent. The general idea, which we encountered earlier, is that in rationalising behaviour - that is, explaining it in terms of beliefs and attitudes - we are concerned to reveal a subject's actions as *making sense* in the light of those and related attitudes; as being reasonable from the agents point of view given their desires or what they view as worthwhile, and what they believe.

Let us introduce a 'standard picture' of how rationalisations work. Rationalising some behaviour is a matter of seeing it as an action done for a reason. X's  $\psi$ -ing is explained, all other things being equal, by appeal to x's desire to bring about something that x believes  $\psi$ -ing will bring about. This belief/desire pair constitutes x's reason for  $\psi$ -ing. This explanation fits a quite general schema (filling out *some* of the *ceteris paribus* clause):

- (A) For any x, if
- (i) x desires that p
  - (ii) x believes that  $\psi$ -ing is a means to bring it about that p
  - and
  - (iii) there is no alternative option believed by x to bring it about that p which is preferred by x
  - (iv) x has no other desires which override p
  - (v) x knows how to, and is able to,  $\psi$
- then

(vi)  $x \psi$ -s (ceteris paribus).

There are a number of features we should note. This explanatory schema captures not an empirically ascertainable pattern we find in behaviour, but a condition that our explanations of actions - in terms of particular distributions of attitudes - in an appropriate sense<sup>7</sup> *must conform to*. It provides an *a priori* theory of propositional attitudes such as belief. Such generalisations as (A) reflect our understanding of the relevant *concepts* (of action, belief, desire) and their interrelations. A good way to see this is to switch the consequent with any of the components of the antecedent. What we find is (part) of an *analysis* of the relevant concept. Take desire:

(D) For any  $x$ , if

(i)  $x \psi$ -s

(ii)  $x$  believes that  $\psi$ -ing is a means to bring about that  $p$

etc.

then

(vi)  $x$  desires that  $p$  (ceteris paribus).<sup>8</sup>

Consequently, knowing someone's beliefs and desires enables us to determine, ceteris paribus, what their actions will be. Likewise, knowing someone's beliefs and what actions they undertake enables us to determine, ceteris paribus, what their desires are (so, if I know you think there is beer in the fridge, and I see you getting beer from the fridge, then, ceteris paribus, I know you want a beer).

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<sup>7</sup> A normative rather than (at least merely) nomological necessity. It is Wittgenstein's 'logical must'. See chapter 3.

<sup>8</sup> This presentation of 'the standard picture' is owed largely to Peter Lanz, 1993.

Secondly, if an agent does not behave in a way which we expect, this does not lead us to revise our view of rationality, as expressed by such generalisations as (A) and (D). They express *norms* of rationality; capturing our expectations regarding how rational agents *ought* to behave. Rather, we will question our initial attribution of attitudes (or, occasionally, the rationality of the agent). Moreover, we will continue to do this, refining our ascriptions in the light of available evidence, until the behaviour is revealed as approximately rational, and the action explained (in approximate conformity with these schemata).

Lastly, the applicability of such ‘principles’ of rationality should not encourage the view that action explanation is a straightforward instance of deductive-nomological explanation. Although such explanations can be represented as practical syllogisms, principles such as (A) do not figure as extra premises in deducing some action statement from belief/desire statements, since they are preconditions of ascribing beliefs and desires. Moreover, as the schemata make clear, the *ceteris paribus* clauses are an *essential* feature. There is no specifying the conditions under which (A) holds in general. Crucially though, this is not because we are often ignorant of the exact contours of a subject’s mental life - so that our explanations are merely partial - but rather because what are held constant by appeal to reasons for action (that is, under *ceteris paribus* clauses, say concerning the absence of preferred alternatives) *are themselves governed by what ought rationally to be the case* (for example, that rational people’s preferences ought to determine their desires or choices).

Evidently, the explanatory power of rationalisations increases the more sense we are able to make of the agent's mental life - that is, the greater our ability to trace linkages between the beliefs and attitudes that compose it, and the less the need to revise our ascriptions. Shining light on this system is discovering how it coheres to form a detailed picture of a rational agent with goals, desires, preferences, opinions and knowledge. Our aim then is to bring as much of this system as possible to bear upon the task of explaining (and predicting) their behaviour. In doing so, in 'inferring this system from the evidence' viz. their behaviour, we are guided by a concern to maximise its coherence with our understanding of what is a rational thing to do, that is what one ought to do.

Hence the 'no echo' claim is that we organise or generate a picture of an intentional agent in a fundamentally different way to that by which we project the properties and characteristics of a physical system. To explain or predict someone's behaviour in terms of reasons is to see it as resulting from a system of beliefs, desires, preferences, intentions, hopes, fears etc. which is partly determined in accordance with certain *normative* conditions or considerations of overall rationality.

4. Davidson thus appeals to the constitutive force of rationality in motivating his anomalism; particularly as it concerns, for him, the impossibility of strict psychophysical laws, but more interestingly in clarifying the character of rationalistic explanation. His 'no echo' claim rests on the existence of distinctly normative principles of rationality which operate as constitutive conditions upon the ascription of mentalistic explanatory concepts (indeed, they provide an a priori theory of propositional attitudes). As such,

mental anomalism can be expressed in terms of the existence of a certain non-nomological pattern which rationalistic explanation exploits (in analogy with the way laws capture causal patterns). Such a view of the explanatory distinctness of the mental is endorsed by Jaegwon Kim:

I suggest the following line of reconciliation: on Davidson's account the mental can, and does, have its own 'laws'; for example, 'laws' of rational decision making. The crucial point, though, is that these are *normative* rather than *predictive* laws.<sup>9</sup>

The 'reconciliation' Kim speaks of here is between anomalism and explanation - viz. how a concept can be both anomalous and explanatory. Kim's proposal appeals to the operation of normative laws, or norms, as counterparts to causal laws. The reason for this must be the common belief that the credibility of an explanatory scheme resides in its approximation to deductive-nomological explanation, where subsuming instances under general laws (even if not strictly nomological) is the aim of explanation. So, on this view, particularism is the enemy of explanation (rather than non-nomologicality per se). The credentials of 'normative' explanations are thereby made to turn upon the existence of a comparable generality in the mental-normative realm; a generality, moreover, which is apparently expressed in the *ideality* of norms. The difference relevant to anomalism is just that settling upon what rationality requires, in contrast to natural laws, is to determine what *ought* to happen.

This raises an obvious question - centring on our ability to specify, or indeed make sense of, a generalisable notion of, the requirements of rationality. For, as I argue

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<sup>9</sup> Kim, 1985, p.383.

below, a good case can be made for thinking that the generality assumed in the contrast between norms and laws is problematic, undermined in particular by our *inability* to specify what, in general, rationality requires, and indeed where these ‘requirements’ apply. This engenders two problems for the thesis of anomalism; that we belie the putative ‘constitutive’ character of rationality, and compromise its *normative* force (that is, as placing distinctive demands over behaviour).

I will argue, in mitigation, that it is a mistake to place too heavy a burden on the notion of norms or principles of rationality in the articulation of mental anomalism; that is as non-nomological counterparts of natural laws. Rather, it does not defeat the thought about normative explanations that our understanding of what one ought to do, think or say is not so codifiable. The link between normativity and rationality has to be more subtly understood. What is the substance of the worry?

5. An important aspect of the ‘constitutive’ role of rationality is in establishing *a priori* limits on the intelligibility of (intentional) subjects. In the context of motivating anomalism, the question is whether there are distinct and non-trivial (that is substantive) *a priori* limits, since all explanations have constitutive conditions which delimit what is to be intelligibly counted as a system of the relevant kind.<sup>10</sup>

Our worry is most obviously manifest in concern about the ability of an account which makes conditions of rationality constitutive of our mental lives to deal with the

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<sup>10</sup> I note in passing that putting things like this makes some sense of Davidson’s claim that such principles have the formal status of synthetic *a priori* principles.

phenomenon of *irrationality* in its various guises. How strongly should we take the presumption of rationality? If characterising action or intention can only be done against the background imputation of rationality, what do we do with rationality-recalcitrant evidence? Deny its possibility? Can such a position permit evidence that could trump or pre-empt considerations of rationality? This worry brings into question whether there are *a priori* limits to the intelligibility of agents.

On the standard picture, interpreting agents as broadly rational is not an option - it is a precondition of attributing beliefs and desires. The problem is that the more we play up *a priori* rationality conditions, and thus increase the apparent anomalous character of the mental, the less truck we can have with the very notion of 'evidence' of irrationality. We might then claim that we just cannot intelligibly tolerate irrationality *within* the system of intentional states, so that 'irrationality' marks some other, perhaps deeper psycho-pathology. But can we so easily delimit what is 'within' the system?

The question of how much or what kind of irrationality or 'exotic' rationality our explanatory concepts can intelligibly tolerate certainly has a substantial bearing on the issue of anomalism; that is, on clarifying the lack of fit between the mental and the physical. Stich's arguments for the 'parochiality' of propositional attitudes bear substantially on the issue of their relation to, in particular, the explanatory kinds of current cognitive science. Very briefly, Stich argues that we can only intelligibly attribute propositional attitudes to those subjects who are ideologically, referentially and

inferentially similar to ourselves. This ‘parochiality’ renders the central notion of content irreducible.<sup>11</sup>

If parochiality is characteristic of belief/desire explanations, it does pose questions specifically for the *normative* character of the rational mind, at least in so far as one is persuaded by the thought that the credentials of normative explanations turn on their functioning as analogues to those involving natural laws. But this is what I want to contest. I want to agree that a form of parochiality (or perspective-relativity) is characteristic of normative explanations, but that far from impugning their explanatory credentials, it is part and parcel of the critical-evaluative appeal to the ‘ideal of rationality’ which an overemphasis of explicit and general norms is apt to miss.

6. We have seen that part of this constitutive role of rationality is in marking *a priori* boundaries of intelligibility; that considerations of rationality frame the horizon within which any task of interpretation is undertaken. However, construed as such, we might still question whether this establishes a thesis of anomalism, of genuine distinctness, i.e. *precluding* a reconstruction in terms of the kind of intelligibility proper to nomic science.

Assuming that this latter involves subsuming relations between events as instances of what tends to happen, we might speculate, taking the example of deductive reasoning,

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<sup>11</sup> Like Quine, Stich goes on to draw eliminativist conclusions. See his 1982 and 1983. Not that these considerations fundamentally go beyond what is implicit in Davidson’s discussions of interpretative ‘charity’ - the injunction to interpret on the basis of an assumed general agreement in belief between interpreter/interpretee. For he would no doubt agree that in ascribing propositional attitudes, we have to assume broad agreement in belief system (ideology), that interpreter and interpreted inhabit the same world and carve it up similarly (reference), and that they logically organise their beliefs similarly (inference). These assumptions form part of the fabric of rationalising explanations. In as much as they are resisted in specific cases, our interpretations falter.

that the limits of a deductively rational mind are traced in accordance with laws which describe the statistical frequency of certain kinds of inference. The constitutive force would thus accrue to this minimal 'standard of rationality' - the highest common denominator in actual inferential practice. Of course, and this is very much to the point, one might well balk at the use of the term 'inference' to describe this, since in fact the 'laws' would advert merely to certain state transitions. For to describe something as an inference is to mark one's sensitivity to the concept of, here, deductive consequence (or, more generally, of what it is to have cogent reasons for belief/action) which, as John McDowell persuasively argues, is a *normative* notion.<sup>12</sup> This is not to say that it is false that one who repeatedly fails, say, to reason in accordance with *modus ponens* cannot thereby be considered mental in the relevant sense. Rather, it is that we would have no explanation of why there is just *this* threshold of intelligibility without the availability of the rational 'ought' (viz. that one thought can provide compelling reasons for another); that is, in the absence of an account which appeals to how one's beliefs *ought* to be related.

The point of drawing attention to the normativity of concepts of rationality - a good argument, a valid inference, a rational plan, a good reason for acting etc. - is to make clear the distinctive explanatory work done by attributing a constitutive role to them, in particular as having the status of an *ideal* (which has 'no echo' in physical theory). I have touched upon the role of such concepts in what Davidson calls rationalistic

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<sup>12</sup> See his 1985. In much of the following I help myself quite liberally to thoughts originating in this seminal treatment of the link between rationality and normativity.

explanation, where the concern is to reveal an agent's behaviour as making sense, as being reasonable, from their point of view; and, quite generally in ascribing propositional attitudes. But, importantly, 'ideal' here is not merely a reference to idealised norms of rationality, to some specification of an optimally rational performance. Apart from the fact that actual behaviour will more often than not fall arbitrarily short of instantiating an 'ideal', we can have no idea of what, in general, constitutes an optimal performance with respect to the vast majority of those mental activities relevant to the explanation of action - for example, in inductive reasoning, in how our emotions are integrated with our beliefs and desires, and concerning the impact of our perceptual experiences.

Rather, I want to argue that 'ideal' is best understood as stressing the essentially critical-evaluative purpose of explanation in terms of reasons. Far from impugning distinctive explanatory work, this is absolutely central to the ideal-invoking kind of explanation involving propositional attitudes. Specifically this stresses the manner in which employing concepts such as belief, intention and action involves a critical (and reflexive) engagement with those we interpret. A notional ideal is required to provide this critical basis for ascriptions of propositional attitudes. The gap between the actual and a (notional) ideal allows room for the critical-evaluative distinctions between good, bad, better and best plans/ arguments/ inferences/ reasons. Indeed, the prescriptive force of these locutions is precisely dependent on this critical foundation. It is *good* reasons, indeed the *best* I can muster, which recommend, and justify, courses of action. Moreover this critical dimension applies to the conceptions of rationality themselves, for the understanding of what their requirements are - so that in making subjects intelligible in

terms of the reasonableness of their thoughts and deeds one might reveal that one's conception of what rationality requires itself requires modification.

The most obvious aspect of propositional attitude explanations which this evaluative dimension brings out is the distinctive way that they involve sensitivity to the subjective nature of the mental - to being shaped by what makes for an *intelligible point of view*. This is most clearly relevant to the periphery of intentional life - to the impact of experience upon perceptual belief, for example. However, this perspectival constraint upon intelligibility is quite general. It is not merely that one's concern in attributing reasons is with interpreting the behaviour of a particular individual at some particular time and location, but rather - something it would be barely possible to attempt in objective, say purely causal, terms - that the business of revealing behaviour as coherent and reasonable, as having something to recommend it, is with revealing that behaviour as making sense from, as it were, *the inside*.

There is, then, a quite fundamental sense in which such explanations are, as stated, *perspectival*. Indeed there is a further sense in which they are, which relates directly to our worry. Let me present this by way of reposing that problem. The thought about points of view might be taken to undermine talk of the constitutive role of rationality in that the notion of the 'ideal of rationality' only works where we have a general grasp on what it is; on what rationality requires (such as is the case with deductive rationality). Since we have no general grasp of such things in the case of inductive inference, perceptual belief, emotion (to name a few), the thought about normativity lapses. Let us call this, following Child, the problem of the uncodifiability of rationality:

[T]here is no fixed set of rules or principles from which, together with a statement of the circumstances of any particular case, we could deductively derive a complete, detailed specification of what one ought to do or think in that case ..... no definite set of rules or principles for arriving at the best interpretation of an agent..... no stage at which we can say that the canons of rationality have been exhaustively enumerated, that there is nothing more to add.<sup>13</sup>

The suggestion here is that the considerations relevant to explanations in terms of reasons, beyond the exigencies of any particular case, need have no general or abiding impact across particular cases. The implication this has is that there is a kind of particularism in the intentional scheme at odds with the idea we have a general pattern which it is the business of distinctly intentional concepts to reflect:

Since there is no codifying the considerations we use in interpretation, we cannot represent the interpreter's task as the arbitrary one-off choice of a scheme of interpretation, which she then simply applies; rather, the interpreter must assess what rationality requires in particular situations by considering each situation as it arises.<sup>14</sup>

So the perspectival character of normative explanations shows up both on the side of the interpretee - in their sensitivity to the subjective articulation of a mental life - and on the side of the interpreter - in the uncodifiability of the considerations brought to bear in enabling such an articulation.

But, if what I have said about the 'ideal of rationality' is right, then this uncodifiability should come as no surprise, and can be no threat to the distinctive normativity of the mental, *once we have acknowledged that reason-attribution is an essentially critical, evaluative business*. What I am urging is a demystification of the

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<sup>13</sup> Child, 1994, p.59.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p.73.

notion of the normative ‘ideal of rationality’ which an over concentration upon explicit norms is liable to obscure.

So the obvious response to our worry, and the one I’m happy to endorse, is to simply say that although there may be no saying in general, this is not to say that in actual cases it is not clear what one ought to do, think, say etc. (Indeed, we have, as McDowell puts it, a ‘pre-theoretical (‘common-sense’) grasp’ of the topography of what is rationally intelligible).<sup>15</sup> However, it might be acknowledged that such a move does come with a promissory note attached - that is, to show that the shift to our practical grasp of ‘what rationality requires’ (indeed to our evaluative practices, if I’m right) can remain just that - a grasp of something which places distinctive (normative) *demands* over our behaviour. This issue will be taken up now in connection with Wittgenstein’s rule-following considerations.

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<sup>15</sup> McDowell, op cit, p.391.

### 3.

1. In this chapter, I am seeking to ascertain how a pragmatic turn in our thinking about notions of meaning, understanding and intentionality inaugurated by Wittgenstein's so called rule-following considerations should be taken to bear upon the intuitive idea of the normativity of these notions that we encountered earlier. I begin by showing that the issue of normativity was of central importance to Wittgenstein, in particular the viability of what I call the naïve view. I then look at the anti-intellectualist flavour of his treatment of rule-following and the character of his rejection of Platonism and its cognates, before turning to the roles of the ideas of manifestation and autonomy. This involves an excursion into sceptical and anti-realist readings of that dialectic which resolve in the 'community view' of norms which rejects the naïve view. After rejecting such readings, both independently of and as interpretation of Wittgenstein, I look for a way of understanding the significance of 'practice' which does not compromise the intuitive idea of normativity.

2. I maintain that the question of the origins of the normative shape of action was of central concern to Wittgenstein in his seminal discussion of rule-following and understanding. Indeed the preoccupation with what it is to follow rules - that is, with what it is to *obey* them - marks such a concern. This is revealed in both the *Investigations* and the *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, where Wittgenstein probes the

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concepts of understanding and intention as determinants of action, and in particular what he regards as the dangerous temptation to view understanding as a state or process which mediates between mental items or the contents of minds (such as thoughts, meanings, representations) and their appropriate uses or applications. Similarly, Wittgenstein seeks to guard against a conflation of the kind of determining of action characteristic of intention with *mechanistic* determination. These dangers emerge for Wittgenstein when we recognise a certain characteristic of the intentionality of minds; namely, its normativity.

Such things as grasping the meaning of a word, mastery of a concept or inference, intending to act, appear to place one under obligations concerning how the course of one's behaviour ought subsequently to go. This is to register the now familiar idea that thought, inference, intention, meaning something, are things which relate to the world *normatively*. Specifically, they determine which states of affairs *accord* with a concept or proposition, what one is legitimately *entitled* to infer from what (thus something's being a *good reason* for something else), what is a *fulfilment* of an intention, etc. The normativity of meaning is remarked upon by Kripke:

A candidate for what constitutes ... my meaning one function, rather than another, by a given function sign, ought to be such that, whatever in fact I (am disposed to) do, there is a unique thing that I *should* do.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, we have McDowell:

Suppose someone correctly understands the meaning of, say, "Add 2". Her understanding must be something with which, if she is aiming to put that understanding into practice and has reached "996, 998, 1000" in writing out

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<sup>1</sup> Kripke, 1982, p.24.  
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the series, only writing “1002” next will *accord*.<sup>2</sup>

McDowell goes on: ‘It seems essential to be able to make this kind of use of notions of accord if we are to be entitled to think in terms of meaning and understanding at all’.

Indeed, if we take reference to ‘understanding’ as designating a way of determining behaviour, specifically as grasping or knowing how to go on ‘in accordance with’ one’s conceptual commitments, then we can see that concern as occupying the core passages of the rule following considerations.<sup>3</sup> The guiding question raised by Wittgenstein in connection with this view is whence this authority, this distinctive way of being *bound* to behave?

Let us outline a picture of what is involved in understanding which we can call ‘the naïve view’. If I understand what I am doing, then on reaching a certain point in the continuation of a mathematical series, for example, it is quite natural to say that my subsequent behaviour is *guided by the rule* I am following; that is, I comprehend, quite unreflectively, what *its* requirements are. We talk of ‘grasping’ the rule as a description of understanding, as marking a point at which we have come to unreflectively know just how to ‘go on’. What is common to these ways of talking is the idea of understanding as extending, as having consequences for future action; and thus of *patterns* of correct use or sequences of action which are determined in accordance with objective standards of what constitutes going on in the *right*, the *correct* way. The idea is of these as abiding requirements, antecedently ‘there’ and thus something to which learning, instruction,

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<sup>2</sup> McDowell, 1992, p.40..

<sup>3</sup> Somewhat arbitrarily, the passages running from ##143-242. See also passages in section VI of his 1967a.

etc. can open one's eyes. Importantly, it is these patterns that we pick up on when we understand each other's behaviour. For example, when I understand someone correctly, when I have grasped their meaning so to speak, it is precisely in virtue of my seeing their behaviour as embodying allegiance to a pattern and thus fraught with implications (and which I am likely to gloss in terms of 'speaking English'). It is thus analogously unreflective in the case of the third person. That is, I know without having been able to rule out alternative explanations of their behaviour (such as that they are in fact speaking a deceptively similar, but different, language).<sup>4</sup> *We can have, on the naïve view, direct and unproblematic access to each others conceptual commitments.* Let us see how this naïve view of normativity underpins the philosophical issues.

Wittgenstein's concern with our *intuitive* idea of normativity, aside from its being implicit in the very notion of rule-following,<sup>5</sup> is revealed in his concern with the conflation of the determining of action with that of mechanical determination. Problems emerge, Wittgenstein tells us, when one reflects upon the way in which intentions, thoughts, wishes, concepts (applied in judgement) seem to *extend* beyond themselves, anticipating their fulfilment or satisfaction<sup>6</sup>; or in the way understanding or grasping a concept or expression appears to move one ahead of oneself, as it were. This is perhaps

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<sup>4</sup> A philosophical diagnosis would draw attention to the naïve view's embodying a form of disjunctivism about the facts of meaning, etc.

<sup>5</sup> It is somewhat of a misnomer to call the general concern with normativity 'rule-following considerations'. Wittgenstein's discussion does not solely concern the graphic case of applying explicit rules or formulae - he discusses a whole range of mental phenomena - including ordering and reading, besides the more familiar examples of expressive language and mathematical competence. Nevertheless, he does often talk of 'rules' in connection with all these, bearing witness to the influence of Kant's conception of concepts as rules, and applying explicit formulations of them as the paradigm case of rational activity.

<sup>6</sup> I do not wish to suggest that these constitute a homogeneous class of mental phenomena - but they are alike in respect of this feature of their intentionality.

easiest to see in the case of applying (mathematical) concepts, the paradigm case of rule-following:

Your idea was that that act of meaning the order ['add 2'] had in its own way already traversed all those steps: that when you meant it your mind as it were flew ahead and took all the steps before you physically arrived at this or that one.<sup>7</sup>

But, as Wittgenstein elsewhere stresses, this is a ubiquitous feature of intentional or contentful phenomena:

A wish seems already to know what will or would satisfy it; a proposition, a thought, what makes it true - even when that thing is not there at all! Whence this *determining* of what is not yet there? This despotic demand? ("The hardness of the logical must.")<sup>8</sup>

Unsurprisingly, this feature of intentionality ('the logical must') is what I have been calling normativity. Putting the point philosophically, what distinguishes states with conceptual *content* is that they have normative conditions of satisfaction, or correctness conditions. The danger comes when we combine the intuitive thought with a bias towards mechanistic determination - say the way the parts of a machine contribute to its functioning, a causal 'must'.<sup>9</sup> Lapsing into this way of thinking, we are left with the idea of the characteristic normativity of intentionality as a peculiar form of natural necessitation, which is both super-rigid (i.e. Platonistic, see below) and yet quite precarious (I may 'go wrong' at any point).

Something of a consensus exists in seeing Wittgenstein as recoiling from both

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<sup>7</sup> 1958b, #188.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, #437.

<sup>9</sup> I am uneasy in using the locution 'causal' in describing this form of determination, not so much because it would credit Wittgenstein with a view I'm not sure he held (that reasons can't be causes), but more positively because, as Davidson insists, the contrast is better drawn with reference to mechanism (which itself contrasts, explanatorily, with citing causes). Nevertheless, Wittgenstein does use 'causal', e.g. at ibid #195 and #220.

Platonistic and psychologistic responses to these questions (which I will elaborate below) - a recoil from 'queer' models of normativity.<sup>10</sup> Not so regarding the extent of his recoil. Certain influential interpretations of Wittgenstein's reflections on rules and understanding have him recoiling in such a way as to cast doubt upon the sustainability of the naïve view.<sup>11</sup>

3. Platonism is one kind of response to questions concerning the origin of normative patterns of behaviour. The naïve view might be taken to suggest the anticipation of, let us say, logical space<sup>12</sup> by the rule (concept, word, thought, wish) *itself*. This is given clearest (but by no means clear) expression by the Platonist. Thus, if we ask how a rule determines just those acts which accord with it, whether that rule concerns the application of a word, or, in Wittgenstein's preferred example, the continuation of a mathematical series, the Platonist thought appeals to a property of the rule itself of *containing* the extension of the pattern, much as we might imagine a continuous roll of railway track being unravelled, sleeper by sleeper. This is the overtly Platonist imagery Wittgenstein characterises thus:

Whence comes this idea that the beginning of a series is a visible section of rails invisibly laid to infinity? Well, we might imagine rails instead of a rule. And infinitely long rails correspond to the unlimited application of a rule.

"All the steps are already taken" means: I no longer have any choice. The rule, once stamped with a particular meaning, traces

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<sup>10</sup> See *ibid* ##195-6.

<sup>11</sup> See Kripke, *op cit*, and Wright, 1980.

<sup>12</sup> 'Logical space' would be mapped by tracing the normative liaisons accruing to states. The intuitive idea corresponds to what Sellars called 'the logical space of reasons'.

the lines along which it is to be followed through the whole of space.<sup>13</sup>

Rules might thus be modelled on abstract objects which we are to understand prescribe all future and counterfactual use, by containing their lines of projection. Continuing the metaphor, *understanding* thus consists in our being able to accurately trace these lines or rails sleeper by sleeper, thus engaging our cognitive wheels. But the trajectories exist quite independently of our techniques and methods of projection, extending outward to infinity: to complete the metaphor, one might say they exist quite independently of human engineering.

The principal defect with Platonism is that the explanation it offers of the determining of what is a correct application of a rule, concept, word, etc. is regressive, indeed viciously circular. I shall turn to this in some detail in the following sections. But it is instructive to note, following Wittgenstein, that the proliferation of metaphor here is a characteristic feature of the Platonist position, precisely since the kind of determination envisaged is entirely mysterious ('queer'). Not the least of this centres on its implausibility as a model of understanding and knowledge which are rendered entirely epiphenomenal. That is, Platonism makes one's grasp of the rule play no part in the shaping of the correctness of one's behaviour, since at best understanding so conceived is a fortuitous 'hitting upon' the right course. Take the example of correctly inferring. The drawing of conclusions need amount to no more than an inexplicable urge to entertain a new thought. It makes that understanding essentially revelatory and instantaneous, grasping the whole pattern 'in a flash', with the knowledge of how to go

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<sup>13</sup> Wittgenstein, 1958b, §§218-9.

on thereby strangely indifferent to what one actually goes on to do (“All the steps are already taken”). Wittgenstein spends a great deal of time debunking this mythology.

Another ‘queer’ model would be a kind of psychologism which seeks to preserve the super-hard relation of rules and their applications but concretise its objects.<sup>14</sup> Thus instead of the rule itself containing its lines of projection, we get some original intention, or ‘act of meaning’, which determines the lines running along which constitutes correctness or accord. To preserve the thesis as an answer to the question of *normativity*, the envisaged mechanism must be *ideal*, rather than actual, hence my characterising it as a variant on Platonism. It thus has something of the quality of an ideal *disposition*. Thus, by means of some super-psychological mechanism it is supposed, can a rule be welded to its correct uses or applications so as to make for this super-hard form of determination. But this is just the conflation of normative and mechanical determination that Wittgenstein rejects.

Nevertheless, Wittgenstein is alive to the fact that these mythologies are the natural result of philosophical reflection on the *ideal* nature of thought (its normativity).<sup>15</sup> Indeed we have to ask what is suspect in the Platonist picture, rather than assume that what it enjoins is mistaken *tout court*. After all, as Cora Diamond stresses, it is a *mythology* that Wittgenstein exposes, rather than a false account of

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<sup>14</sup> ‘Psychologism’ may not be the best term for this view, which Wittgenstein discusses at various points but especially at 1958b §§188-197. As Frege initially characterised it, psychologism is rejected precisely because it reduces the normative to the psychological - as expressed in the idea that logic discovers the ‘laws of thought’. The view being rejected by Wittgenstein is the psychological version of mechanism, which is close enough to Frege’s target for my purposes.

<sup>15</sup> As he elsewhere puts it, ‘Thought is surrounded by a halo’ (ibid, #97).

how things are.<sup>16</sup> So perhaps we might suggest that the Platonist captures something important about the intuitive notion of meaning - namely, a certain autonomy from actual dispositions - but places it in a rather fantastical setting. It is a philosophical corruption of a genuine insight. The resulting picture, which casts this autonomy as something almost *noumenal*, might then be seen as some kind of graphic exaggeration of this insight.<sup>17</sup> Wittgenstein reiterates the thought that the Platonist imagery is a way of drawing attention to the distinction between mechanistic and logical (normative) determination.<sup>18</sup> The key, he suggests, is to recognise that this imagery is just that, 'symbolical' and 'mythological'.

This sketch of Wittgenstein's concerns leaves the details of his response to these mythologies largely undisclosed, and indeed the extent of any recoil. Does his persuasive hostility to Platonism and its cognates represent an assault on the naïve view? Let us then turn to the interpretation of the rule-following considerations.

4. We are concerned with Wittgenstein's examination of our intuitive understanding of the kind of appeal we make to following rules as an explanation of behaviour. His qualms, as we have been seeing, are given graphic expression in the discussion of rules conceived as 'rails laid to infinity'; in our appeal to rules as making available a

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<sup>16</sup> See Cora Diamond, 1991, especially pp. 1-11. Diamond talks of mythology as akin to *fantasy*. See her chapter 1 of the same, for an application of this idea to empiricism. Some caution is required here. The thought is not that Platonism could not be a false account of what is involved in following rules, but rather that Wittgenstein seeks to expose the mythological form that the intuition takes in Platonism. See also McDowell, 1994, pp.176-7.

<sup>17</sup> In using the term 'noumenal' I am intending to focus both on the sense in which, according to the suspect picture, the paths meaning trace extend, as Wright puts it, *of themselves* to new cases, and also on the seeming *ineffability* of what one thus understands.

<sup>18</sup> Wittgenstein, 1958b, #220.

notion of understanding as a cognitive *predetermination of correct use*. The principal upshot of this picture is a form of Platonism about rules - that rule-following, or understanding, is a matter of having one's behaviour conform to what Crispin Wright calls an 'ulterior standard', some transcendent determinant of correctness. Now, it is on this image of what is involved in rule-following that an obvious form of meaning scepticism feeds. For if the 'paths' which constitute conformity with a rule are traced independently of my, or anyone else's, dispositions, as the picture requires, then we appear to open the possibility that, for example, what is meant by an expression (the putative rule one is following) might outstrip what is capable of being revealed to others, or for that matter to oneself - that meaning might come adrift from anything I could, *in principle*, convey.<sup>19</sup> As Putnam expresses it, the problem concerns 'the 'possibility' that someone might mean something different by a word although the supposed difference in meaning *does not show up in any behaviour at all ... linguistic or extralinguistic*'<sup>20</sup>. This concern conforms to a familiar epistemological injunction that appeal to a particular kind of knowledge or understanding as an explanation of behaviour must be able to tell us what counts as a *manifestation* of that knowledge. On the Platonist conception, such an injunction is flouted, since knowledge of meaning could evidently transcend the actual uses of expressions which would

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<sup>19</sup> I take it that something like this is the moral of Kripke's sceptical argument (see next section). See also Putnam, 1996.

<sup>20</sup> Putnam, *ibid*, p.254 (my italics). The scare quotes indicate that for Wittgenstein the 'problem' is a pseudo one, that there is no such 'possibility'. The question then concerns the nature of his diagnosis of and therapy for such a 'misunderstanding'. See Wittgenstein, 1958b, #201 and section 4 below.

manifest such knowledge. An important question concerns whether the naïve view itself flouts this epistemological demand.

Clearly the idea of meaning or intentions not ‘showing up’ was anathema to Wittgenstein, and in some sense we must come round to seeing that this is not possible, that it is a non-problem induced by a philosophical corruption of intuition.<sup>21</sup> It courts scepticism in an area where scepticism is arguably least welcome (though also least comprehensible), particularly in its making the ‘facts’ of meaning appear radically transcendent of our consciousness.<sup>22</sup> It makes communication a matter of faith that, as Wright puts it, ‘we have internalised the same strongly autonomous ... rules’.<sup>23</sup> If we are to make anything of understanding, particularly as a source of the kind of knowledge which we can legitimately claim to share (e.g. about language, other minds etc.), this picture had better be dislodged.

Once we have acknowledged the normativity of intentionality and meaning, what blocks a clear-sighted view according to Wittgenstein is a certain non-compulsory picture of how the understanding mind ‘grasps’ the demands that rules place on us. We are tempted, in considering understanding as a process, to see an essentially inert mind as requiring some intermediary step or process to somehow breathe normative life into thought and action. The contents of a mind are like sign posts which await *interpretation* to link them to determinate courses of action.<sup>24</sup> But if interpretations are themselves

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<sup>21</sup> The epistemological demand for manifestation - that meaning cannot transcend use - is a central component of Wittgenstein’s epistemology and his philosophy of mind, as witness *ibid* #580: ‘An ‘inner process’ stands in need of outward criteria’.

<sup>22</sup> See *ibid* #192: the ‘superlative fact’.

<sup>23</sup> Wright, 1989, p.243.

<sup>24</sup> See Wittgenstein, 1958b, #85.

signs which can be variously interpreted and interpreting is thus merely replacing signs with signs, we are stuck in a regress, since it was precisely the conception of mental items *as* signs which stood in need of a connection with action, with uses:

Any interpretation still hangs in the air along with what it interprets, and cannot give it any support. Interpretations by themselves do not determine meaning...

[W]hat has the expression of a rule - say a sign-post - got to do with my actions?<sup>25</sup>

Granted that appeal to interpretation is thus regressive, it can seem compelling to appeal, in the manner of Platonism and psychologism, to some interpretation-terminating, or self-interpreting, ('superlative') fact which constitutes my meaning.<sup>26</sup> But such a fact is a chimera, at least while we cling to the model of the relevant facts which generates the regress - viz. as merely signs awaiting interpretation. McDowell (1992) persuasively shows up this view of the mental as normatively inert until interpretation takes place. His point turns on the idea that a state credited with *content* is such that its very identity is constituted by its having certain (normative) satisfaction conditions. So, on the view that is under consideration, what is 'in my mind' is literally contentless.<sup>27</sup> This point is entirely consonant with the characterisation of the naïve view as given by Wittgenstein ('A wish seems already to know ...'). This is precisely the intuitive

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, #198.

<sup>26</sup> See also Wittgenstein, 1958a, p.34:

What one wants to say is: "Every sign is capable of interpretation; but the *meaning* mustn't be capable of interpretation. It is the last interpretation."

<sup>27</sup> See his 1992. The view he sends up has it that, for example, what is in my mind when it occurs to me that someone is talking about me next door is merely what could be interpreted as the thought that someone is talking about me next door.

What I have in my mind is at most a potential vehicle for the significance in question, in the sort of way in which a sentence, considered as a phonetic or inscriptional item, is a vehicle for a significance that it can be interpreted as bearing. (McDowell, 1992, p.46).

idea of the *intrinsicness* of their satisfaction conditions, and it is this which can make the Platonist model appealing once one has embarked on the regress.

5. According to Kripke's celebrated interpretation of Wittgenstein's reflections on rules and private language, the central dialectic here concerns the construction and subsequent disarming of a sceptical paradox concerning the ability to see one's future semantic behaviour as in accord with one's past semantic intentions, and consequently a problem concerning the viability of appeal to what one *means* by an expression as an explanation of one's subsequent use of it. If we construe the paradox as an argument, we have the conclusion that there is no fact about me (neither about my past intentions, nor my behaviour) which constitutes my meaning one thing rather than another by a particular term. The paradox emerges when we see this conclusion as indicating the impossibility of meaningful language.

According to Kripke the regress of interpretations is a version of familiar epistemological paradoxes, such as the thesis of the underdetermination of hypotheses or theory by data, or of Goodman's problem of projection.<sup>28</sup> This problem concerns our inability to privilege one way of extrapolating a pattern from a finite sample over any possible rivals. To take Kripke's own Goodmanesque example, suppose that we, naturally, appeal to my grasp of the addition function, my meaning *plus* by '+', in explaining my past success in performing a range of computations. Suppose I confront a novel sum, '68 + 57', one which I have never performed, and to which I give an

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<sup>28</sup> See Goodman, 1965.  
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appropriate answer, '125'. Suppose now somebody queries this response, saying that in all consistency I should have answered '5', with the explanation that in the past I meant not *plus* but *quus* by '+', where *quus* is the function of performing addition on pairs of integers of less than 57, returning 5 as the sum of all others. The challenge is clearly to come up with some fact which privileges *plus* over *quus* as the rule I have been following with '+', which makes it the case that I should indeed have responded as I did.

In what would such a fact consist? Presumably, in what I took the instruction to dictate - in other words, in how I understood '+', in my grasp of its meaning. And surely this would be revealed or manifested in the contents of my mind or in my subsequent behaviour. But as Kripke's sceptic points out, one can hardly appeal to some feature of, or something that accompanied, my past intentions as determining what I should do in the novel case. Nothing (as we shall see, literally no thing, *no item*) 'in my mind', whether it stands for 'my meaning x' or merely accompanies it, can bestow meaning on my words or fix a rule for the future because any item can be variously interpreted so as to be consistent with my having meant, felt, been struck by etc. *quus* rather than *plus*. The same interpretive question will persist for whatever one 'brings to mind', according to Kripke's sceptic.

Nor, evidently, can one appeal to my behaviour, since it is precisely the actual finite sample of my behaviour with which *quus* is consistent (and which is thus putatively explained by it). To suppose that my meaning *plus* is constituted by a *disposition* (to add rather than quadd) is of little help when we realise that for any actual manifestations of a disposition, there will always be the same interpretive question about

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*what* it is a disposition to do, of what is being or has been manifested.<sup>29</sup> No matter what aspect of my mental or behavioural history one appeals to, one cannot privilege *plus* over *quus*. Of course, there are indefinitely many different (and contradictory) explanatory *quus*-like hypotheses consistent with my past mental and behavioural history, with the upshot that the suggestion that I determinately mean anything by '+', *that there is anything to which my past commits me*, is unsustainable.

So, as Kripke sees things, Wittgenstein sets up the problem of normativity as one of finding some fact which forges the right bridge between a subject's past intentions and their present or future use of an expression. The search is for some state, or some mental/behavioural item, possession of which constitutes being determined to do just the right kind of thing - i.e. the source of a determinate pattern of behavioural commitments. The search, according to Kripke, founders on the rocks of the underdetermination of correct interpretation by the relevant mental and behavioural evidence:

This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule. The answer was: if everything can be made out to accord with the rule, then it can also be made out to conflict with it. And so there would be neither accord nor conflict here.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> There are other reasons for thinking of dispositions as a poor model for understanding. One is that a disposition is not something which captures normativity (for example, one's behaviour doesn't keep faith with a disposition). This is central to Kripke's understanding. See also McDowell, 1984. Relatedly, it makes understanding essentially mysterious to the subject, rather than a source of knowledge. So, for example, a chain of valid reasoning appears as a series of de facto accurate hunches. See Brewer, 1995. In this regard it is akin to Platonism. See above.

<sup>30</sup> Wittgenstein, 1968b, #201. Kripke clearly takes Wittgenstein to hereby embrace the sceptical paradox – the 'answer', or, better, conclusion to which is the loss of the central normative distinction between accord and conflict. What Kripke overlooks is Wittgenstein's real answer to the paradox which immediately follows at 1958b, #201, which is a fairly unequivocal *rejection* of the reasoning behind the paradox, rather than an acknowledgement of the need to pursue a sceptical solution.

If there is no accord, there is no normativity, it would seem. However, according to Kripke Wittgenstein wishes to salvage a semblance of normativity, to bring us back from the precipice of conceptual and semantic anarchy by offering an albeit sceptical solution to this paradox (in keeping with his Humean philosophical instincts). All that we have to relinquish is our insistence that to mean something is for there to be a fact in the world which constitutes that meaning, and replace it with the idea of socially articulated assertability conditions. No individual considered in isolation can determinately mean anything by 'x'. We can however preserve talk of meaning (and the normative distinction between accord and conflict) by considering the individual in the context of their participation in a linguistic community which has the authority to confer or withhold the normative status of 'meaning x' on any individual (in the light of sufficient perceived agreement in behaviour). Let us call this latter 'the community view'.

If our problem was making sense of how meaning can determine use, our solution is to come round to seeing that meaning is a socially instituted status, a matter of certain actual patterns of use being regarded as constituting 'meaning x'. This seems a tame enough conclusion, for it makes it seem that rule-scepticism requires only a theoretical modification to our conception of meaning and understanding (for example, rejection of the truth conditions approach to meaning), whilst preserving their intuitive normativity (in the guise of the community sanction).

I will argue that the community view is untenable in #7 below. Will this do as an interpretation of Wittgenstein's dialectic? That interpretations do not settle normative

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issues of accord is unquestionably Wittgenstein's chief consideration. But there are serious obstacles in the way of a sceptical reading of Wittgenstein's polemic; that is, understood as an argument for the rejection of the factuality of ascriptions of meaning. To reiterate, Kripke casts the regress of interpretations argument thus: there is no way to privilege one hypothesis about how we interpret expressions or signs over any possible others. In the subject's own case, the interpretation ('how it strikes me') cannot determine what is in accord with the rule since, as we saw, such mental accompaniments themselves stand in need of 'correct' interpretation. For Kripke, as there is no way of breaking out of this circle of interpretation, no 'superlative fact' or privileged interpretation, about the contents of my mind, it is concluded that there is no fact which determines correct use.<sup>31</sup> Kripke is committed to looking for a solution to the regress amongst the very things which generate it - the relevant fact would have to be the superlative, interpretation-terminating fact. As such facts are chimerical, he concludes that there is nothing 'about me' in which my meaning one thing rather than another consists. In other words, having rejected the Platonist and psychologistic option Kripke therefore has Wittgenstein embracing a non-factuality (sceptical) thesis.

However, as a number of commentators have suggested,<sup>32</sup> this appears to flatly ignore a crucial remark Wittgenstein makes which occurs at the summation of the discussion of rules and which strongly suggests that the 'paradox' is not compelling.

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<sup>31</sup> This conclusion, note, rejects the naïve view, according to which one's behaviour can unproblematically manifest the norms one is subject to.

<sup>32</sup> Baker and Hacker (1984), McDowell (1984) and McGinn (1984).

Having suggested that the reasoning in the paradox embodies a ‘misunderstanding’, he concludes:

What this shews is that there is a way of grasping a rule which is *not* an *interpretation*, but which is exhibited in what we call “obeying the rule” and “going against it” in actual cases.<sup>33</sup>

So, the conclusion of the regress of interpretations argument is, *pace* Kripke, that there is a way out of the paradox-inducing, ‘superlative fact or no fact’ dilemma, and which appeals to our customary *practice* of obeying and going against rules. Kripke does not exhaust the possible facts in which meaning and understanding might consist, since he retains the non-compulsory conception of the relevant class of things from which we might hope to do the trick (and that Wittgenstein seeks to supersede) viz. *interpretations* or hypotheses. This is precisely the view of contentless minds that McDowell sends up. In other words, *the proper response to the (legitimate) worry that meaning qua hypothesis or interpretation cannot be manifested is not to tinker with the notion of meaning, but to reject the identification of meaning with interpretation.*

Secondly, there is the suspicion that Kripke thereby misrepresents the problem of normativity as it concerned Wittgenstein and, independently, as it ought to concern us. The transtemporal problem Kripke poses thus concerns, for example, whether I can be said to be (now) going on in the *same* way as I previously intended. Is this a version of underdetermination? The principal objection to this will concern its extension beyond a concern with public language to conceptual content generally, for there does not appear to be any analogue in the case of concepts to the gap that might exist between my

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<sup>33</sup> Wittgenstein, 1958b, #201.  
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intentions to apply and my use of a word. This is because there is no analogue for concepts of the literal/speaker meaning distinction. That is, where I could mean (in the sense of speaker meaning) something different in my use of the word 'red' on a subsequent occasion of use, say applying it to green and red things after dusk, I could not similarly employ the *concept* 'red' differently from my original intention - to, say, classify red things. If I did apply it other than as I had intended (and rather than making a factual error), it would thereby be a *different concept*, though I might be using the same word to describe it. Kripke's mistake is traceable to the failure to acknowledge that there isn't the gap between the contents of minds - such as concepts and their applications - that would permit the kind of systematic concept to world mismatch that grounds the problem of underdetermination. (Indeed it inveighs against the view of the contents of minds as 'items' in this sense at all).

Indeed, if this is what Kripke's problem turns on, it doesn't seem especially pressing (nor indeed particularly about normativity), since it amounts to the standard epistemological question of telling what it is to have one concept rather than another.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, the metaphysical force of Kripke's paradox - that there is *no* fact of the matter as to what meaning or concept I use, is lost. His negative answers to behavioural and dispositional criteria of rule-following work to establish not the non-factuality thesis, but something quite different - viz. that at best meaning and understanding 'supervene' on too gerrymandered a set of behavioural and psychological conditions for an explanation

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<sup>34</sup> See McGinn, op cit and Bilgrami, 1993.  
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of the semantic in terms of the psychological or behavioural; and that is *an irreducibility thesis*.

6. A somewhat different route to a similar thesis - the untenability of the naïve view - can be found in Wright's reading of the rule-following considerations.<sup>35</sup> According to Wright, Wittgenstein arrives at a certain revisionary view of meaning as a result of arguments which rely on clearly anti-realist premises. So, in brief, our inability to recognise in what shared understanding consists on traditional accounts of meaning (particularly those which assume the naïve view), entails that there are no such things as the facts of shared understanding so conceived. Wright's strategy is to show that Wittgenstein argued that the view of meaning and understanding which appeals to knowledge of the rule as an explanation of use, which embodies the idea of commitment to determinate patterns of use, must in the end hold such patterns to be *idiolectic*, a notion which Wittgenstein goes on systematically to dismantle.<sup>36</sup> So meaning and understanding cannot consist in grasp of those patterns conceived according to the naïve view.

First, a brief remark on anti-realism. In the context of meaning and understanding, the anti-realist is perhaps best understood as attempting to set out the conditions for an epistemologically respectable notion of meaning. Like Kripke's sceptic, the anti-realist is motivated by the thought that whatever meaning and

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<sup>35</sup> Amongst other places see his 1980 and 1989.

<sup>36</sup> The relevant sections being the discussions leading to 1958b, #202; section VI of 1967a, and in the so-called Private Language Argument (beginning circa 1958b, #243).

understanding consist in, they must be ‘fully manifested’, rather than requiring the formulation of hypotheses about what lies behind behavioural exteriors; that is, they cannot be ultimately a matter of divination. As a result, the anti-realist claims that understanding language must be couched in *verification-amenable terms* if it is to describe a secure basis for knowledge. This is to say that the facts of what semantic understanding consists in must be recognisable from a perspective which does not presuppose (components of) that understanding, the thing under investigation, and thus a perspective from which their putative truth is not merely assumed, but verifiable.

According to Wright, Wittgenstein’s central argument proceeds by establishing that the idea of shared understanding of the rules for using expressions is simply and illegitimately assumed by traditional (in particular, realist) accounts of meaning. There is no way of establishing conclusively that two people share understanding conceived as grasp of a rule, and that their ‘agreement’ will not break down on the very next occasion, because their actual behaviour does not *distinctively manifest* understanding of this or that rule so conceived. This is the anti-realist working through of what is elsewhere called the problem of underdetermination. So ‘shared understanding’ must, in the end, be shorthand for simple agreement in actual and counterfactual use; that is, that the agreement is constituted by an open set of statements about use (characterising what he elsewhere calls ‘primitive dispositions of agreement in judgement and action’). For an anti-realist, as we could not recognise the truth of such a set, being open, we cannot sustain the idea of *the fact* of shared understanding at all. There is just ongoing agreement in use (subject to ratification, as we shall see).

However, this need not of itself impugn the idea of grasp of a pattern of use *in my own case*; that is, of knowledge of how my own understanding of the terms of the rule commits me to behaving. Surely, I know in my own case what rule I am following? It is this supposed asymmetry of first/third person, which Wright then takes Wittgenstein to reject. So the dialectic is that understanding conceived as grasp of a determinate pattern of use must be idiolectic, and that this idiolectical knowledge is revealed to be illusory. How so?

The substance of this supposed asymmetry turns on the intuition, according to Wright, that the knowledge I have in my own case is ‘a special case of knowledge of one’s own intentions’. The idea is of my having *privileged access* to the contents of my own intentions (eg. to intend X by ‘X’), and that via my grasp of them, what they commit me to is somehow made transparent. But, we should ask, what could the content of this knowledge be? Knowledge of an objective pattern? The problem is that whatever items I bring to mind to furnish my intention – ‘*that’s* the kind of thing I mean’ - falls foul of the fact that whatever *seems* the same - seems objectively similar, and thus in keeping with the pattern - will, to me, *be* the same:

All that I can effectively intend to do is to apply [e.g.] ‘green’ only when it seems to me that things are relevantly similar; but that is not a commitment to any regularity - it is merely an undertaking to apply ‘green’ only when I am disposed to apply ‘green’.<sup>37</sup>

So, in conclusion:

... I cannot, just by personally meaning words in a certain way, bind myself to a certain pattern of use.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Wright, 1980, p.37  
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So, according to Wright, the conception of meaning that comes under fire from Wittgenstein is one which is hopelessly wedded to the view that meaning something by an expression is keeping faith with an idiolectical standard. Granted the failure of this model to sustain talk of an objective pattern of use, to sustain the normative distinction between seeming to conform and conformity to a rule, Wright urges us to acknowledge that there are no objective facts about agreement in meaning so conceived - that is, as constituted by shared commitments to patterns of use. All there is is ongoing agreement in 'use'; that is, certain observable similarities in the dispositions of individuals to linguistic behaviour. This is the basis of meaning:

None of us unilaterally can make sense of the idea of correct employment of language save by reference to the authority of securable communal assent on the matter; and for the community itself there is no authority, so no standard to meet.<sup>39</sup>

Like Kripke, Wright does not want to have Wittgenstein thereby rejecting normativity, the 'contractual' basis of meaning. The upshot of the recoil from Platonism, according to Wright is that 'the foundations of ... rule-governed institutions reside not in the circumstance that we have internalised the same strongly, autonomous, explanation-transcendent rules, whose requirements we then concur - or concur enough - about, *but in primitive dispositions of agreement in judgement and action*'.<sup>40</sup> But such a resolution is, at best, only partial precisely because of the demand for normativity. Rather,

...it requires an alternative: a conception of rules ... which allows sufficient distance between the requirements of a rule and the subject's reaction in a particular case to make space for something worth regarding as normativity,

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p.38

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p.220

<sup>40</sup> Wright, 1989, pp.243-4

yet abrogates the spurious autonomy which generates the difficulties.<sup>41</sup>

What Wright finds in Wittgenstein is that the 'patterns' of use which constitute going on in the right way are simply not traced *independently of the gauge of community assessment*. It is not that 'anything goes' in matters of meaning. They [the patterns] are just not independent of the considered judgements of the community of language users. So the 'paths of meaning' are constituted by actual patterns of use (manifestations of dispositions) which are correct or standardised purely by dint of community ratification.<sup>42</sup> Much like Kripke's sceptical solution, it is the securability of communal assent that confers the status of 'correct pattern of use' upon what are merely contingent similarities in the dispositions of individuals to behave in certain ways. As such, it similarly finds no support for the naïve view in Wittgenstein.

7. An argument which showed that, given the sceptical/anti-realist premises, the resulting picture fails to preserve the characteristic normativity of meaning, would constitute a transcendental argument against that form of scepticism or anti-realism.<sup>43</sup> My concern is not so much with anti-realism, but with the view that on the basis of Wittgensteinian considerations, we can get by with something other than the naïve view. I have pointed out that Kripke's Wittgenstein is not Wittgenstein. But does the

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p.243

<sup>42</sup> This is an interpretation of Wittgenstein. However, in his original work, Wright maintains a version of this anti-realism, with the stress not on the role of the community but of judgement generally. Ascriptions of meaning would be like ascriptions of secondary qualities - just as what it is to be 'red' is not independent of favourably placed judgements as to redness - so in the case of meaning. See his 1989.

<sup>43</sup> See McDowell, 1984. This assumes, of course, that some notion of normativity is essential to any viable notion of meaning, something which Kripke and Wright endorse. I shall come to a more radical view which denies that meaning is normative in any interesting sense in due course.

community view, as the position into which Wright and Kripke resolve, have any independent plausibility as an account of the normative character of meaning and understanding?

The principal obstacle to the community view's aspirations is that it seeks to preserve normativity on the back of what we might call a regularity theory. In placing manifestation at a premium, such an account eschews anything but behavioural regularities couched in verification-amenable terms - seeking a level of epistemologically unproblematic facts or data out of which to reconstruct the conceptual commitments of subjects. If there are normative facts, they must be built out of facts about regularities in behaviour. Now *norms*, as those things that mark the difference between those who are bound by them and those whose behaviour merely conforms to them, do not show up on *that* surface (the rejection of the naïve view). But, we are told, this is only devastating if we merely consider the individual *in isolation*, since in the context of participation in a linguistic community we have the resources to mark the normative distinction between real and merely apparent rule-following. As Peacocke summarises the view:

In the end, Wittgenstein holds, the only thing that must be true of someone who is trying to follow a rule, so long as we consider just the individual and not facts about some community, is that he is disposed to think that certain cases fall under the rule and others do not. But this is something which is also true of a person who falsely believes that he is conforming to a rule. His general argument is that only by appealing to the fact that the genuine rule-follower agrees in his reactions to examples with the members of some community can we say what distinguishes him from someone who falsely thinks he is following a rule.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Peacocke, 1981, p.73.  
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Observable regularities are unproblematic. In the case of individuals considered in isolation these are insufficient for normative ascriptions, but at the level of the community we can appeal to the community verdict to settle matters of accord. The community has the facility of dignifying certain patterns as 'correct'. Instantiating *these* regularities is what matters.

However, the problem emerges when we realise that the introduction of the community does not offer a *reductive* basis for characterising normativity - rather it can be seen to rest upon an ineliminably normative, and thus illicit, notion of *authority*.<sup>45</sup> Firstly, the idea of the community 'assessing', having 'attitudes', is strictly speaking a fiction. Where it does make sense, that is where some mechanism exists for settling on a community verdict, via deferment to an appropriate body, it appeals to the special normative status of being *authoritative*. Secondly, and relatedly, some assessments (or assessors) clearly matter more than others. We recognise and defer to *experts*, those invested with authority by way of their performances or judgements being critical or incorrigible. It is the regularities in their assessments which are crucial. Quite generally, community membership is a matter of bearing a relation to (the assessments of) *these*, not just *any* others. Of course, it may be that we can specify non-normative ways of picking out the privileged few, but that is a further question.<sup>46</sup> Thirdly then, and crucially, the relation an individual community member must bear to 'the community' is itself normative - presupposing the distinction

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<sup>45</sup> The community view has been attacked along similar lines by Simon Blackburn, 1984.

<sup>46</sup> As it is in the case of Wright's own suggestion of judgement-dependence. There, this normativity is presupposed in the evaluative concept of a *best* judgement. Of course, one might go on to explain 'best' in non-normative terms - say in terms of reliability. But that too is a further question.

between those whose behaviour merely conforms to the assessments of some group (i.e. instantiates the right regularities), and those whose behaviour *ought* to so conform, i.e. those who are *answerable* to them. Community membership in the relevant sense - that is, in a sense sufficient to capture what Wright calls 'the *contractual* basis of meaning' (my italics) - is purely a matter of the latter.<sup>47</sup> So, de facto relations of 'authority' will not do, since they merely require relations of power or force.

On a different note, it is hard to resist thinking that once one has given up on a certain view of what it is we share when we understand each other, there is no good reason for thinking we can claw back certain desirable features of the view thereby displaced. That is, if the basic material out of which meaning and understanding are composed exists at the level of contingent similarities in our behavioural exteriors narrowly conceived, why should we resist the thought that there isn't anything more to be said about the truths of meaning? We are simply being urged to acknowledge that nothing but brute facts about our primitive dispositions - the legacy of the commonalities in training, processes of socialisation, biological imperatives and the like - nothing but this 'tissue of contingencies'<sup>48</sup> holds our verbal behaviour in intelligible check. Isn't anything more merely to pander to the Platonist urge to have something more viscous than this underneath us?

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<sup>47</sup> See Robert Brandom, 1994, pp.37-40.

<sup>48</sup> McDowell, 1984, p.349.

Indeed, the right to something more seems to disappear once we relinquish a certain view of the individual, as expressed in the naïve view. The right that we think we have is, in McDowell's phrase, the right to take one another at 'face value'.<sup>49</sup> This is constituted by nothing more than our mundane, quotidian claims to know what somebody is *saying* by their words etc., that their behaviour forms a certain familiar, intelligible pattern - it constitutes a stream of *speech*. The substance of our ordinary claims to understanding somebody involve the perception of (the mutual responsiveness to) the commitments and obligations involved in the attribution of certain contents (thoughts and concepts) – a perception, moreover, of something which is essentially diachronic, fraught with implications, patterned; *not something which we (me or the community) interpret as such*. To talk of perception here is perhaps to suggest that this is merely an account of the phenomenology of 'understanding'. However, as McDowell stresses, this is no less than to claim a right of access, so to speak, to facts of a certain order - that is, facts about the contents of thoughts. It seems to me that we have a choice between this picture or one in which norms do not figure (to which I will turn later), and nothing in Wittgenstein suggests we can have some ersatz picture which attempts to reintroduce normative notions once these rights have been relinquished.

8. Despite resisting the 'community view', it cannot be doubted that Wittgenstein sought to inaugurate a pragmatic turn in our thinking about meaning and

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<sup>49</sup> See McDowell, 1981, *passim*.

understanding. The trick, I am suggesting, is to see how this pragmatic turn relates to the naïve view of their normativity.

I have suggested that Wittgenstein makes two principal moves in the rule-following considerations. Firstly, he acknowledges the normative demands (in the sense of the naïve view, viz. a distinctive way of being determined to do something) that rules - in the broadest sense - place over us. Secondly, he maintains a negative thesis that being so determined, understanding or grasp of those demands, is not a matter of a mental process of *interpretation*, linking mental items such as thoughts and intentions to action. His positive thesis, such as it is,<sup>50</sup> is enshrined in remarks such as:

To obey a rule, to make a report, to give an order, to play game of chess, are *customs* (uses, institutions).<sup>51</sup>

And hence also 'obeying a rule' is a practice.<sup>52</sup>

Understanding is manifested in our practices, in our customary uses of signs, expressions, gestures. Wittgenstein's recoil is from a certain model of what it is to grasp normative demands, the paradigm of which is interpretation. I suggested earlier in connection with Kripke's construal of the regress of interpretations argument, that this does not constitute an anti-mentalism or anti-individualism (in the sense that invites an ineliminably *social* construal of meaning and understanding). However, it clearly expresses Wittgenstein's *anti-intellectualism*. I am using 'intellectualism' as

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<sup>50</sup> Much controversy surrounds the characterisation of Wittgenstein's 'positive' remarks, whether they constitute a gesture towards some new philosophical treatment of meaning, or merely form part of a general corrective, commensurate with his therapeutic philosophical method.

<sup>51</sup> Wittgenstein, 1958b, #199

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, #202.

the view that what one grasps or understands is an object of cognition (or 'intellection'), *something it is possible to mentally consult*, such as an interpretation or hypothesis. However, this seems extendable to other cases, such as formulable reasons or justifications, and it is clear that Wittgenstein took it to apply to having reasons:

"How am I able to obey a rule?" - if this is not a question about causes, then it is about the justification for my following the rule as I do. If I have exhausted the justifications I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: "This is simply what I do".<sup>53</sup>

Now this can make it seem that Wittgenstein's anti-intellectualism *is* an attack on normativity in the light of a particular paradigm case of normativity - such as having reasons for action - which I have endorsed (and which I will exploit much later in chapter 7).<sup>54</sup>

However, I think Wittgenstein's anti-intellectualism has two implications for our thinking about norms. First that 'rules' should not be regarded simply as *explanations* of use, as antecedent conditions for action, the obtaining of which one has to 'get across' when making oneself understood:

For just where one says "But don't you *see*..." the rule is no use, it is what is explained, not what does the explaining.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid, #217.

<sup>54</sup> Although Wittgenstein includes 'reasons' among those chimerical mental 'items' in which meaning cannot consist, I do not think we need to see reasons in this way, or the idea of language as a rational form of activity as problematic here. That is, I think the moral of Wittgenstein's anti-intellectualism that we should draw is a rejection of the idea of the contents of minds as items 'awaiting interpretation'.

<sup>55</sup> Wittgenstein, 1967b, #302.

There is a strain of thinking in Wittgenstein which he held in common with thinkers such as Ryle, and which is mistakenly thought of as behaviourist, which simply draws attention to the proximity with which core mentalistic concepts - such as understanding, meaning, but also thinking, believing - stand to action, to concepts of activity (e.g. checkmating one's opponent, asserting that p, finding x is F).<sup>56</sup> This proximity reveals the unsuitability of the model of mental *antecedents* in many cases of action. It is a corrective to the view of the mind as essentially inert and standing in need of a connection (causal or otherwise) to action.

Secondly, and relatedly, his positive thesis reveals not that the shift to practices, uses, customs, institutions involves a departure from a concern with normativity, but that there is a form of norm which is not a matter of explicit reasons or justifications.<sup>57</sup> (Recall: 'What this shews is that there is a way of grasping a rule .... which is exhibited in what we call "obeying the rule" and "going against it" in actual cases'). Of course, if rules are ultimately implicit in practice, the principal question concerns how they are manifested - i.e. what are the practices in which my grasp of these particular contents is manifested? But this is *not* Kripke's question - in what does my grasp of *plus* rather than *quus* consist? - because it is surely characteristic of Wittgenstein's philosophical orientation that when it comes to matters of meaning there really aren't these (reductive) issues of constitution to be raised - they are *sui generis* matters, 'bedrock'. The only interesting question left is

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<sup>56</sup> One should perhaps add that for Wittgenstein, this proximity is 'grammatical'.

<sup>57</sup> If we needed reassurance, we can look elsewhere, where he says (1958b, #289): 'To use an expression without justification does not mean to use it without right'.

about manifestation. As he makes clear in the *Remarks on the Foundations of*

*Mathematics*:

Following according to the rule is FUNDAMENTAL to our language game.<sup>58</sup>

and that

the difficult thing here is not to dig down to the ground; no, it is to recognise the ground that lies before us as the ground.<sup>59</sup>

9. I am crediting Wittgenstein with the view that our intuitive picture of the normativity of meaning and understanding - the naïve view - survives the pragmatic turn that is the upshot of the rule-following considerations. This is primarily what I want to take out of this discussion. However, some commentators take the moral of the story - its therapeutic coda, 'bedrock' - to mark an end to the philosophical anxieties thrown up by meaning and normativity.<sup>60</sup> Despite some sympathy with this - most clearly with respect to the meaning-scepticism that Kripke and Wright flirt with (supposedly on Wittgenstein's behalf) - I am less sanguine about its constituting an end of the story. In particular, I don't feel that it offers an effective stance against a rejection of the normativity of meaning *tout court*. How *can* 'practice' constitute obeying a rule? How *can* meaning remain normative and yet not 'transcend use'?

One possible attack might be to acknowledge that our intuitions are strong and formative, but that this just shows that we need to remove them root and branch as infected by a 'residual Platonism'.<sup>61</sup> For another, not unrelated, stream of pragmatism

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<sup>58</sup> 1967a, VI #28.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, VI #31.

<sup>60</sup> See McDowell, particularly 1994.

<sup>61</sup> Bilgrami, *op cit*, *passim*.

flows through the principal modern semantic traditions, and which aims at clarifying the psychological context which linguistic meaning-theories occupy. One of the legacies of Wittgenstein's thought is the emphasis on how language is *used* in getting at meaning. This anti-Platonist insight forms the backbone of those frameworks subsequently developed for the philosophical discussion of meaning. As we have already seen, this poses a fundamental question - how the emphasis on use fits with our intuitive idea that meaning is normative. My attention now turns to these frameworks for discussing, in particular, the communicative use of language, for it has seemed to some to lead to the claim that there is no interesting sense of the normativity of meaning or language per se - the result, I will claim in chapter 5, of a bifurcation of the competencies of communication and meaning. Indeed, my aim will be to suggest how being embedded in certain *discursive* practices salvages normativity.

## 4.

1. In this chapter, I move from a concern with the normativity of intentionality to a concern with the normativity of linguistic meaning. The idea that the notion of normativity encountered thus far is readily extendable to language can seem compelling. Indeed this is encouraged by the fact that the constitutive ideal of rationality that governs intentional concepts appears to re-emerge in the context of the interpretation of linguistic behaviour in the guise of principles or norms of interpretative charity. However, although this commonality captures the thought that we cannot but place action (including linguistic behaviour) within a normative explanatory space, I argue that, in its orthodox formulation, the theory of radical interpretation is associated with a revisionary view of linguistic competence which, among other things, denies any interesting thesis of the normativity of meaning. I outline the development of these Davidsonian views on meaning and interpretation and the role of charity, seeking to understand them ultimately in terms of a pragmatic reorientation in the theory of language, specifically to an inversion of the priority of the notion of a language over that of successful interpretation. However, though sympathetic to this shift, I look to resist any inference to claims which impugn the very idea of linguistic normativity, specifically by arguing that this inference trades upon a non-compulsory view of the relations between the psychological, pragmatic and semantic elements in the theory of language and communication.

2. I argued in the last chapter that Wittgenstein inaugurated something of a pragmatic reorientation in our thinking about intentionality and action, but that this marked his *response* to and his engagement with, rather than rejection of, the problem of normativity that emerges in the critique of Platonism and its cognates.

The aim of the present chapter is to further develop the idea of a pragmatic turn in our thinking about meaning, and to begin an assessment of its impact upon the thought that meaning is a normative notion. I now move from intentionality, as that concerned us in the last two chapters, to linguistic meaning; to how the idea of normativity figures in the context of the interpretation of linguistic behaviour.<sup>1</sup>

In a move parallel to that made by Wittgenstein on intentionality, I want ultimately to reject any inference from the anti-Platonist thought that linguistic meaning is an artefact of our communicative activity, to the conclusion that meaning and language are not normative. Such an inference, I argue, is made tempting as part of a plausible pragmatic reorientation in the theory of meaning which finds its most persuasive expression in Davidson's philosophy of language. Importantly, in his notion of interpretative 'charity' Davidson is the first place one might look for a working through of the suggestion that notions of normativity as readily accrue to language and meaning,

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<sup>1</sup> This does not, however, involve a shift from a general question of normativity to more local issues; or indeed from putatively more fundamental questions of mind to issues further 'downstream' in the cognitive/behavioural chain leading to linguistic behaviour. Questions pertaining to the explanation of action generally are inseparable from those pertaining to the interpretation of language, via the connective tissue of the attribution of content. As will become clear this is a commitment derived from my Davidsonian point of departure, which rejects the idea that we can have prior and independent access to the content of thought over language.

as to concepts of intention and action. But, as we shall see, charity is something of a *faux ami* to one keen to defend, as I am, the thought that as language users we are distinguished by the normativity of the competencies involved.

Beyond this, I will also in this chapter begin to make ground in outlining the principal ingredients of the kind of position I favour in reconciling pragmatism with normativity. To this end, the notion of communication emerges into view. It will be seen that it is over the treatment of communication that a lot of the work is to be done in motivating such a position. As the question of where communication fits in a theory of language is the focus of the next chapter, the arguments of this chapter and the next are really to be taken together. As such, these chapters seek to arrive at a framework for the treatment of language use which potentially meets both meaning-theoretic desiderata and the challenge to reveal the normativity of the competencies involved.

After a recap of the very idea of linguistic normativity, I begin by looking at the idea of a theory of radical interpretation as a clarification of the philosophical concern with meaning. With this in mind, I focus on the idea of interpretative ‘charity’ and cognate notions relating to the rationality of speakers, as an expression of the idea that a notion of normativity extends to language and meaning. I locate some significant disagreement in how the role of what I call these ‘rationality constraints’ are understood, and argue that such disagreements express theorists’ diverging commitments on how the psychological, pragmatic and semantic components of theories of language are taken to interact. (I

ultimately argue, over the course of this and the next chapter, that ideas of charity and other norms of interpretation do not offer a viable rendering of linguistic normativity, precisely because these commitments do not issue a plausible framework for treating language use. In particular, in the next chapter I argue that orthodox formal semantics goes wrong in bifurcating communicative and expressive competencies).

In this chapter, I trace Davidson's views on interpretation which resolve in a form of pragmatism which, norms of interpretation notwithstanding, in placing the exigencies of successful communication centre stage, takes itself to radically undermine the idea of a specifically linguistic thesis of normativity. I argue that Davidson is right in his contention that the concept of communication is key to understanding meaning and the divisions of labour in the theory of language, and in his rejection of conceptions of language use which appeal to a speaker's prior internalisation of semantic rules or conventions. However, I look, here and in subsequent chapters, to resist the inference from this to the conclusion that there is no viable thesis of linguistic normativity, and look to motivate an alternative conception of communicative rationality in terms of which we might ultimately frame claims about the normativity of meaning.

3. What might be meant by linguistic normativity, or by the claim that meaning is normative? Well, in the preceding discussion of rule-following, the notions of intentional action, meaning and understanding were treated together in respect of their putative

normativity. Indeed, for Wittgenstein they succumb to the same therapeutic analysis:

To obey a rule, to make a report, to give an order, to play a game of chess, are *customs* (uses, institutions).<sup>2</sup>

One might understand this grouping in terms of the notion of a *conventional* activity; so language, like chess, is normative in being governed by explicit rules or conventions. I argued in the last chapter that tempting as this might appear to be as an understanding of Wittgenstein, it cannot be what he had in mind by what is basic to cases of rule-following, primarily because the model of conventional activity sits ill with the kind of pragmatism he favours (for instance, it can make no sense to speak of an *implicit* convention - the very idea of convention being that of a 'standard' in the setting of which agents, in some sense, *collude*). In this chapter, I shall look at further reasons to be doubtful of the applicability of the notion of convention to an understanding of what is essential to language.

One might then look to the common 'intentionality' of these things and thus to the 'aboutness' of words and sentences; to the idea that, like beliefs and intentions, words and sentences have normative satisfaction conditions (see chapter 3, #2). Accordingly, language is a normative competence in the sense that mastery of language or meaning essentially involves one's sensitivity to the *correctness* or appropriateness of one's linguistic behaviour. Thus, language, like concept use, is not merely an ability to classify, to be able to respond differentially to things which are classed as, for example, true or

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<sup>2</sup> Wittgenstein, 1958b, #199.

false, red or blue, food or not food.<sup>3</sup> Normativity in this sense quite clearly accrues to a *semantic* competence. If we understand linguistic competence as consisting in a set of generative accomplishments - to produce and understand a potentially infinite number of well-formed utterances (or inscriptions) - then we can say that what distinguishes a semantic accomplishment, on this understanding, is its contribution to the determination of the *correctness* of the use of words and sentences that compose those utterances (or inscriptions). For example, in this vein, a formal semanticist might point out that, given that truth is a form of correctness, what makes a symbol system capable of *semantic* interpretation (and thus a language) is precisely its truth-functionality. Of course, this 'correctness' need not necessarily be understood narrowly, inviting a focus on the extension of terms.

This presents a seemingly robust thesis of the normativity of meaning and language - that normativity is constitutive of the linguistic/semantic. Of course the gauge of the plausibility of these rather abstract claims has to be in terms of how they impact on attempts to offer a systematic treatment of meaning as part of the study of linguistic behaviour. I want to turn in a moment to a hugely influential programme in the philosophy of language which, at first blush, looks quite congenial to claims that meaning is normative, but which ends up with a critique of normative models of language mastery. Indeed, it offers what I call a merely 'anaemic' view of normativity - that although there are norms of interpretation, they do not yield a thesis of normativity that accrues to

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<sup>3</sup> Language, like concept use, is free from that kind of stimulus control.

language (and meaning) *per se*. So, normativity is not a constitutive feature of the linguistic. Why is this objectionable?

I spoke in the last chapter of the naïve view of the kind of normativity with which I am concerned - that we can and do have unproblematic and direct access to the conceptual commitments of others. This readily extends to language (indeed it *primarily* attaches to language as the principal means of accessing those commitments). As such, the naïve view of language is that we can have direct access to the meanings of the words uttered by our interlocutors; that we do not need to gain access to some ulterior determinant of meaning. One of the desiderata of an account of meaning is thus going to be that it underpins this epistemology of language. I will argue that the anaemic view fails this.

4. For Davidson, unlike Quine, there appears to be no empirically given ‘way in’ to interpreting a language. By this I mean that for Davidson there is no way of moving from data concerning the observable conditions and the verbal responses they prompt from the subjects of interpretation, to interpretations of those responses as token utterances in some language L, without, specifically, making certain presumptions about the rationality of interpretees, and the structural characteristics of their language.<sup>4</sup> In Quinean terms, for Davidson there is no ‘recovering a man’s language from his currently observed

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<sup>4</sup> It is perhaps easy to overstate the difference between Quine (*locus classicus*, Quine 1960) and Davidson here. Quine himself makes frequent appeal to the need for charitable considerations in the development of the analytical hypotheses that form the backbone of radical translation. It is a residual foundationalism in his epistemology that obscures this.

responses’’<sup>5</sup> if we limit the empirical base of our theories of interpretation to some behaviouristic, or other neutral, specification of ‘observable conditions’ and ‘responses’. The reason for this, we shall see, concerns the link between the project of ‘radical interpretation’, conceived as providing a Tarski-style truth theory for L (see below), and certain non-empirical norms of interpretation. These operate as constraints upon the very evidence for a theory of truth - our ‘way in’ to the language. They accord a certain priority to considerations of rationality, which in Davidson emerges from the semantical primacy of the notion of truth, but which is quite generally the result of the holism that affects the entire intentional-semantic idiom. This, I would argue, is a kindred thought to claims about the constitutive ideal of rationality governing the attribution of intentional concepts in psychological explanations. That is, interpreting behaviour, whether linguistic or not, takes place within broadly normative horizons.

So, I’ll begin with an outline of the idea of radical interpretation and the role of norms of interpretation, such as the principle of charity.

5. Davidson’s major contribution to the philosophy of language is twofold. First, he specifies a set of desiderata that a philosophical theory of meaning for natural languages would need to meet, where a philosophical theory of meaning is distinguished in its characterisation of a set of facts, knowledge of which would suffice for the interpretation of the sentences of a language. Secondly, he argues that a certain formal theory of truth in

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<sup>5</sup> Quine, *op cit*, p.28.

the style of Tarski (1956) can do service as such a theory, and thus that knowledge of the machinery of such a theory would suffice for mastery of a language.

Briefly, the principal desiderata are that the theory be informative, that it be empirically testable, and that it be powerful enough to generate interpretations for any utterance in the language. The latter expresses the condition that the theory must reflect the fact that languages are open-ended - that the set of meaningful, well-formed utterances that a competent native speaker is able to produce and comprehend is infinite. The former two desiderata concern the philosophical commitments to the informativeness of the theory - that it tell us about what it is for words to mean what they do without presupposing semantic concepts, and that it be understood as contributing to an empirical theory of behaviour (and can thus be tested against the actual behaviour of speakers).

A Tarski-style truth theory is a recursive specification of a set of sentences (T-sentences) which give the truth-conditions for any indicative sentence (s) of a language L thus:

s is true-in-L iff p

The derivation of these theorems consists in specifying an axiomatic means of revealing how the truth conditions of any object language sentence are a function of the semantic properties of its constituent expressions, including the subsentential. The theory thus functions as a definition of truth in L, i.e. gives the extension of the truth-predicate in L, by revealing the constituent semantic structure of the language which forms the generative base for the whole (fragment) of the language. What is distinctive about

Tarski's theory is that truth is defined in terms of the relation of satisfaction which holds between sentential functions and sequences of objects. This does not compromise the idea of the primacy of truth in favour of something like reference, since satisfaction is defined in terms of the machinery of the truth theory. Indeed, that meaning emerges in the context of a theory of truth rather than reference is the result of the need to see the theory as part of an empirically testable theory of behaviour, and the thrust of Davidson's holism is that the evidence for such can only be at the level of the use of sentences (and attitudes toward them) and not words.<sup>6</sup>

Accordingly, we meet our requirement (at least for the indicative fragment of the language) of generativity; we are given an informative idea of what it is for words to mean what they do, viz. in the determination of the truth conditions of sentences; and the theory is testable against the actual (assent/dissent) behaviour of L-speakers in observable conditions.

6. Of course, the semantical project here is not separate from the philosophical project of 'radical interpretation', conceived as the task of establishing how one *could* interpret the linguistic behaviour of members of a speech community in the absence of detailed knowledge of their propositional attitudes. Evidently this artifice is an attempt to get at the foundations of linguistic understanding, and a semantic theory - a theory of meaning -

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<sup>6</sup> See his 1984e. As I put it here, the picture emerges from his holistic commitments. A (perhaps deeper) motivation for Davidson (and Quine) is a form of pragmatism - that the priority of the sentential derives from our primary concern in what people are *doing* when they speak.

is plausible in so far as it contributes to the wider project. Radical interpretation is a clarification of the philosophical concern with meaning.

Davidson is concerned, like Quine, with how and where we gain a footing in the process of understanding language. He too wants to expose the nature of the constraints that make interpretation possible. How could we move from observations of uninterpreted verbal responses to a set of interpretations for all native utterances, thus providing a theory of meaning for the native language? The specifically semantic concern of Davidson (unlike Quine, whose concern is primarily epistemological) is evinced in observing that radical *interpretation* concerns translation into a language already understood. The disquotational function of the truth predicate offers a theoretical means of capturing this.

The initial predicament<sup>7</sup> then is to determine the assent conditions of certain native utterances and from there to build up a picture of what is thereby taken to be true – in effect to move from the causes to the contents of utterances. For Davidson, the interpreter's primary data can be represented as correlations between currently observable conditions and states of 'holding true' or taking true some sentence.<sup>8</sup> The assumption here is that native utterances are intentional linguistic acts, which can be taken to express beliefs (at least where the utterances can be construed as assertoric). The data for the

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<sup>7</sup> Again, I stress this is an artifice, not a representation of actual linguistic interpretation 'in the field' (nor indeed of language learning, pace Fodor and Lepore, see below).

<sup>8</sup> A qualification here. The interpreter has to have a grasp of what kind of *structure* the speaker will assent to/dissent from. So, the first assumption made concerns the *parts* of native speech.

theory can thus be represented, following Fodor and Lepore<sup>9</sup>, as singular holding true sentences (SHT) of the following form:

x is a member of the  $\psi$  speech community and x holds true “Es schneit” at time t  
and it is snowing near x at t.

What we need, of course, are general statements of assent conditions for native utterances – generalised holding true sentences (GHT), something like:

(x)(t)(if x is a member of the  $\psi$  speech community then (x holds true “Es schneit”  
at t iff it is snowing near x at t)).

Given Davidson’s view that knowledge of a recursive truth theory for  $\psi$  (on the Tarskian model) would suffice for interpreting any sentence of  $\psi$ , the interpreter must be able to infer from this kind of data certain basic theorems which are formulations of the truth conditions of basic sentential native utterances (T-sentences), of the form:

(T) “Es schneit” is true-in- $\psi$  iff it is snowing.

These statements of truth conditions will thus be the testable theorems of the (compositional) theory that entails them, yielding interpretations for all native utterances. That is, once we have statements of truth conditions for some basic native sentences and a purchase on the logical form of the language, these can be fed back into the machinery of a recursive truth-theory to yield a structurally revealing account of how native terms and expressions might contribute to the truth conditions of whole sentences, and which can ultimately be used as the generative basis for the whole native language.

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<sup>9</sup> Fodor and Lepore, 1994.

So, the general schema for radical interpretation is to move from assent conditions to truth conditions to interpretations of native utterances. The prominent methodological question concerns how we get from GHT's to T-sentences, ultimately in a way that yields acceptable interpretations, theorems of something we can call a *meaning* theory for L. Famously, Davidson's suggestion for getting to statements of truth conditions from general statements of assent conditions is to assume that subjects generally hold true truths, that their beliefs have to be interpreted so as to come out largely true. This displays the operation of the *principle of charity*, which Davidson argues is a precondition of interpretation. It enables us to break through the opacity of belief and meaning by fixing belief to environing (distal causing) conditions. So on the Davidsonian picture, it is charity that enables us to hit upon formulations of truth conditions for native utterances (i.e. by licensing inferences from "S' is held true if and only if p' to "S' is true if and only if p'). Furthermore, the interpreter has to interpret the native language as having a parity of expressive power to her own. That is, structure forming devices (such as the truth-functional connectives) have to be assumed to be a common resource, thereby fixing the logical form of the language (viz. its inferentially significant parts).

If we can apply our general method of interpretation to a speaker at all - if we can make even a start in understanding him on the assumption that his language is like ours, it will be because we can treat his structure-forming devices as we treat ours. This fixes the logical form of his sentences, and determines the parts of speech.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Davidson, 1984b, p.279.

As for whether those formulations are *interpretative*, in some sense of giving the ‘meaning’ of the native expressions, the situation is more complicated, with the problem of the extensionality of the truth predicate suggesting the insufficiency of purely truth-theoretical constraints, such as Tarski’s Convention T, on a meaning theory.<sup>11</sup> I shall return to this presently. Nevertheless we have the idea that norms of interpretation are involved in the most fundamental construction of an empirically testable theory of meaning. This suggests that interpretation, at the least, is constitutively normative for Davidson, in the same way that explanatory concepts of belief and action were seen to be in chapter 2.

7. Having initially located charity in the context of the requirements of developing a theory of truth conditions, it would be remiss not to acknowledge that it stems from quite general features of the interpretative situation; namely the interdependence of belief and meaning and, relatedly, the *holistic* nature of interpretation. If we could get a fix on what speakers believed, on their attitudes, then we would have a route to an interpretation of their linguistic behaviour (indeed action generally). But being able to identify beliefs is of a piece with identifying the content of utterances - if we had detailed evidence of the sort which would ground ascriptions of beliefs we would have evidence of a sort which would enable interpretations of utterances, and vice versa. Such evidence we are *ex hypothesi* denied in radical interpretation. So ‘we must somehow deliver simultaneously a theory of

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<sup>11</sup> See Fodor and Lepore, *op cit*, *passim*.

belief and a theory of meaning'.<sup>12</sup> Secondly, the interpretative task of resolving on the contents of beliefs/utterances is subject to a holistic constraint - identifying something as the what-is-held-true cannot be done in isolation, but must presuppose the possession of other related attitudes. These characteristics are related, since attributing attitudes as a way in to meaning assumes that they reveal what native speakers understand by their utterances. The interpreters coming to know the meaning of a native expression is coming to have some grasp on how that expression ramifies *throughout the native's beliefs*, how native words mediate between thought and the world. This holism and the interdependence of belief and meaning make the task of radical interpreter seem impenetrably hard. According to Davidson it is to charity that we must look for ways of overcoming the opacity of the system of attitudes and linguistic acts.

Granted the interdependence of belief and meaning, the radical interpreter's initial task is to come up with *some* distribution of attitudes (beliefs, at least initially) against which we can solve for meaning, that is derive testable interpretative theorems.<sup>13</sup> For Davidson, this can only be done on the assumption that there is widespread agreement between the interpreter and interpretee concerning the doxastic effects of a common environment. This is to assume at the outset that generally what the interpretee will hold true will be given by the obtaining envioning conditions - that he or she will hold true truths. Putting things the other way round, charity embodies the injunction to attribute as little error and inconsistency as is possible - and this is of course error and inconsistency

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<sup>12</sup> Davidson, 1984c, p.144.

<sup>13</sup> See Davidson, 1984d, p.137.

by the interpreter's standards. Interpretation cannot proceed without the standing obligation of the interpreter to minimise disagreement, and thus ultimately to warp the overall theory to fit rational standards of truth and consistency. Indeed, it is easy to see how widespread error and inconsistency undermine the possibility of interpretation, given holism. If the identity of a belief turns in part on its links with others, on its part in a system, toleration of mistaken beliefs or contradictory or incoherent beliefs cannot be allowed in the main - for anything which undermines the transparency of the links to the interpreter, which undermines a capturable systematicity, robs the interpreter of the ability to identify or individuate beliefs. Clarity can thus be seen as the methodological dimension of holism.

8. So, charity does its work in yielding an initial distribution of attitudes against which the radical interpreter can solve for meaning, by permitting the move from assent conditions to truth conditions. As such it is a methodological principle of theory construction. This can make it seem like a crutch which can be kicked away once an empirical (testable) theory is in place. Such a (minimal) view of the function of norms of interpretation sits very well with those, such as Davidson himself, for whom formal (truth-theoretic) resources are taken to be sufficient for a theory's being properly interpretative (meaning-giving).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Most notably Ramberg, 1989.

One important test of the Davidsonian proposal that radical interpretation (conceived as providing a Tarski-style truth theory for a language) clarifies the philosophical concern with meaning concerns problems engendered by the extensionality of the truth predicate. As such, a truth theory is formally adequate (meets Tarski's Convention T) in so far as it entails only true theorems (biconditionals of the 's is true iff p' variety).<sup>15</sup> Evidently, such theorems will be true in case the constituent sentences are true. So, a perfectly adequate truth theory might entail the theorem "Snow is white' is true iff grass is green', which is a true biconditional but, needless to say, does not give the (English) meaning of 'snow is white'. Concerns about the sufficiency of truth theories, for even the indicative fragment of language, thus turn on the resources for dealing with this problem of extensionality. Moreover, this question brings into focus the sufficiency of the minimal reading of the role of norms of interpretation.

A plethora of counterexamples to Davidson emerges in the literature. A particular truth theory may fail in any number of ways - failing to discriminate constructions containing coextensive but non-synonymous atomic predicates, such as 'has shape' and 'has colour'. Or one might translate an object language expression by exploiting substitutivity relations that speakers of L are not aware of, for example (supposing they comprise a pre-scientific community) translating a term for water by H<sub>2</sub>O. Likewise, following Foster, one might append any contingent true proposition, unknown to speakers

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<sup>15</sup> Actually, Tarski's Convention T also stipulated that the theorems offer translations of object language expressions. However, Davidson does not have the luxury of stipulating this - since in placing a truth theory at the service of a meaning theory, we want interpretations to be *yielded* by the theory.

of L, (say ‘the Earth moves’), as implied by a particular object language predicate, thereby creating alternative entailed theorems (thus alternative theories). Or, following Fodor and Lepore, one might append a logical truth (LT) to a T-sentence to create an alternative true biconditional, such as ‘‘Snow is white’ is true iff snow is white and LT’. All these will certainly yield ‘grotesque’, yet true, theorems.<sup>16</sup>

A conclusion this invites is the insufficiency of purely extensional, truth-theoretic, resources in determining theorems which are properly meaning-giving, since the ability to radically interpret someone would not suffice to determine an interpretative theory for their language. Extensional criteria of theory choice, of what is a best fit, just will not rule out palpably non-interpretative truth theories.

Some urge that this counts against the provision of truth theories as meaning theories altogether.<sup>17</sup> Others urge appeal to further non-empirical criteria of adequacy on truth theories, and thus more wide ranging norms of interpretation. Typically, these concern norms of rationality governing the extra-linguistic, psychological, characteristics of speakers. For example, they may invoke norms pertaining to the way psychological states with the contents licensed by truth-theories are taken to interact. So, when confronted with alternative possible theories, one must look to the broader psychological context of action, building in more substantive assumptions about the typical psychological profile of speakers, in order to adjudicate as to which is properly

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<sup>16</sup> See editors introduction to Evans and McDowell (1976), Foster (1976), Platts (1979), and chapter 3 of Fodor and Lepore (1992).

<sup>17</sup> Foster, *op cit*, and Fodor and Lepore, 1992, 1994.

interpretative. This view stresses that, as part of a theory of linguistic behaviour, the interpretations licensed by one's theory must cohere with a plausible conception of the non-linguistic characteristics of language users. This is to say that, in fact, the radical interpreter, under the aegis of charity, must take a non-defeasible folk psychological theory into the business of interpretation. A succinct expression of this view is given by Evnine:

The Principle of Charity, it seems, is not a single principle which governs interpretation ... but rather a collection of all those principles which together regulate the ways in which beliefs, desires and actions rationally connect with each other.<sup>18</sup>

However, the proper response to the problem of extensionality has two elements. Firstly, one must acknowledge that the importance for semantics of a recursive truth-theory stems not from the *theorems* (T-sentences), but from the *proofs* or derivations of the theorems. It is the manner in which a T-theory reveals the constituent semantic structure of L that matters. The appeal to the *compositionality* of the theory thus offers a truth-theoretic resource for the resolution to the problem of extensionality. So, for example, our preferred theory will reveal the constituent semantic structure of L, assigning roles to constituents which they will play in an indefinite number of other constructions. These roles determine the semantic contribution constituents make to the truth conditions of the sentences in which they may figure. The roles are fixed, extensionally, in those constructions which give the satisfaction conditions for the constituents, for example, in demonstrative or token reflexive constructions such as 'This

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<sup>18</sup> Evnine, 1991, p.110.

is  $\phi$ '. Accordingly given the semantic roles of 'snow' and 'white' in the sentences of L 'This is snow' and 'This is white', our preferred theory for L will entail "Snow is white' is true iff snow is white' but not "Snow is white' is true iff grass is green'. So the idea is that provided the structural relations between sentences are revealed in the derivation of the theorems (T-sentences), we can have an extensional theory of meaning.

When one acknowledges the holistic character of truth theories, one can begin to see beyond the *prima facie* awkwardness of particular truth theories. Secondly, however, the resources of the theory, such as its compositional structure, must be seen over time, in the context of the *evolving totality of T-sentences*. It is, on this view, a mistake to see a truth-theory as a static representation of linguistic competence. In contrast, we should see the construction of this sort of theory, and thus interpretation, as involving the constant replacing, or modifying, of one theory by another, in the light of the evidence of speakers' behaviour. This is the value of a truth theory's being empirical - it is defeasible and dynamic, evolving and being replaced in the light of the developing evidence of speakers' linguistic and non-linguistic behaviour. So when we talk of the failure of radical interpretation to rule out 'palpably non-interpretative' truth theories, we overlook how over time and in the light of the *evidence*, such theories fall by the wayside.

It is easy to miss this characteristic, as witness those who propose broader charitable considerations of 'humanity'. These counsel us to not ascribe odd, inexplicable, or exotic beliefs to interpretees.<sup>19</sup> It is motivated by a desire to avoid what is

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<sup>19</sup> See for example Grandy, 1973.

seen as an unwarranted consequence of Davidson's characterisation of charity in terms merely of general truth or maximising agreement - specifically, that it implausibly precludes the ascription of error. In stressing the *a priori* character of these general considerations of rationality it clearly misses the *defeasibility* of the ascriptions truth-theories are taken to license. Indeed, these all-purpose interpretative heuristics quite generally underestimate the resources available to the radical interpreter. The problem is that they take no heed of the dynamic character of truth theories. For example, in radical interpretation, to be in a position to ascribe beliefs requires that we already have in place an empirically confirmed theory which ascribes structural roles to the constituents of native sentences (in the derivation of T-sentences), in such a way as to *thereby* minimise inexplicable beliefs. The greater the totality of confirmed T-sentences, the less potential there is for incoherence, oddity etc. Ascribing beliefs is part and parcel of a process which is necessarily systematic. We therefore do not need to appeal to anything outside the machinery of a truth theory to handle oddity and the like.

The disagreements concerning the sufficiency of truth-theoretic resources and the role of norms of interpretation therefore reveal the differing commitments of theorists with respect to the relations between the psychological and semantic components of theories of meaning. This is the question of the degree to which an interpreter must bend her interpretations to fit prior conceptions of the rationality - the psychological organisation - of those she interprets. I have argued above that one should not underestimate those

resources, nor thus overestimate the role of norms of interpretation. This strongly suggests that 'charity', as a methodological norm of theory construction, does not offer a good basis for claims that language or meaning are normative (although I think it gives expression to the thought that projects of interpretation are constrained to some degree by considerations of rationality). The conclusion that radical interpretation - as a clarification of the philosophical concern with meaning - does not offer a characterisation of language or meaning as involving normative competencies is reinforced if we look at the specifically pragmatic context of radical interpretation, and Davidson's critique of the concept of language.

It is central to the Davidsonian perspective that there will sometimes be a trade off between the evidence of the behaviour of speakers and considerations of rationality when constructing a theory of interpretation. That is, it is up to the theorist whether, in the light of fresh evidence we alter our interpretations of their utterances or their beliefs. This is the essence of holism. My concern is with showing that where one thinks normative notions gain purchase cannot be understood independently of one's commitments regarding the appropriate pragmatic and psychological context in which meaning theories are taken to operate. I want to show that it is a commitment to the centrality of the notion of linguistic communication - an expression of a form of pragmatism that I find compelling - that leads Davidson ultimately to downplay linguistic normativity, indeed reject it.

9. Something which it is easy to overlook when considering the detail of radical interpretation is that, as Davidson himself conceives it, its explanandum - contrary perhaps to popular opinion blinded by the hard surface of talk of formal truth theories - is not primarily linguistic competence abstractly conceived, but *successful linguistic communication*.<sup>20</sup> This is a consequence of insisting that a theory of meaning be part of an empirical theory of behaviour, coupled with the holistic nature of the evidence for it. Indeed, it is a corollary of the fact that in radical interpretation we confront the actual speech of individuals, not anything we can antecedently grasp as a language.

This is interesting precisely because, as we saw above, what tends to motivate modifications to or indeed rejections of radical interpretation as a characterisation of the philosophical concern with meaning is really the thought that placing a truth theory at the service of a meaning theory abstracts too far from the psychological context of language use. Although I have some sympathy with these thoughts, particularly as they concern formal semantics quite generally (which will emerge later), it is worth noting that what Davidson ends up with is a *critique* of the traditional basis of claims about language use - specifically a critique of the concept of a language, understood as a body of rule-based or conventional knowledge which is applied to particular cases in interpretation. Davidson's view, I think, is driven by his understanding of the pragmatic context of theories of language, rather than his insensitivity to it - specifically, by how our theoretical concern

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<sup>20</sup> See in particular his 1984b and 1986.

with language and meaning is constrained by the nature of the exigencies of successful interpretation (communication). Let us see this in more detail.

The picture of radical interpretation that emerges in Davidson's later writings (1984b, 1986), stresses its *evolutionary* character.<sup>21</sup> We saw above that the resources of such a theory *qua* meaning theory conceived in quite stringent truth-theoretic terms can only be appreciated in acknowledging the dynamic and holistic character of the processes of its ongoing construction. Part and parcel of this is the nature of the interaction between speaker and interpreter. One casualty of adopting the stance of radical interpretation is the model of a fixed, static linguistic competence, around which the interpreter can probe for a definitive characterisation of a meaning theory.<sup>22</sup> There is instead an indeterminacy at play which is essential to the concepts with which the theory deals (rather than, as Quine would have it, a defect in those concepts which calls out for a more respectable surrogate) - an indeterminacy of Heisenberg proportions in that the process of interpretation does not leave interpreter and interpretee unchanged. The *process* itself (fluid and dynamic as that is) is reflected in its subjects.<sup>23</sup>

Radical interpretation is therefore both critical and reflexive. Guided methodologically by the attempt to maximise true theorems, the radical interpreter gains more by revising her own beliefs and assumptions than by attributing error to those she is trying to understand.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> This is also prominent in Ramberg's reading.

<sup>22</sup> This forms the mainstay of Ramberg's response to the Evans/McDowell/Foster view - that their criticisms presuppose that we can make sense of *the* meaning theory (*the* correct set of interpretations) for a language.

<sup>23</sup> There is perhaps something of this in Davidson's remark in his 1984f that 'the methodology of interpretation is ... nothing but epistemology seen in the mirror of meaning' (p.169). This is a remark central to Malpas' (1992) reading.

<sup>24</sup> Ramberg, *op cit*, p.140. I think this is an overstatement.

The terminus of interpretation, in so far as it makes sense to talk of such, is successful communication - in which some sort of agreement is achieved between interlocutors on the meaning of a speaker's utterances. The question most prominent in 'Communication and convention' and 'A nice derangement of epitaphs' concerns what this agreement consists in - what the content of this 'shared' understanding is. Davidson's answer, controversially, is that it bears little resemblance to what philosophers and linguists have thought. Thus the concept of a language itself, understood in terms of a set or semantic rules or conventions which govern the uses of the expressions employed regularly by members of a speech community, comes in for critical scrutiny. Such rules or conventions just aren't required in order to account for successful communication, as the case of malapropisms is taken to demonstrate (see below).<sup>25</sup> The idea being displaced is that what we share in linguistic understanding - what is manifested in successful communication - exists essentially prior to any particular communicative (interpretative) exchange. Such a view is common to characterisations of competence in terms of 'what every speaker knows'. Of course, what we (as interpreters) bring to these situations will include much inductively grounded expectation, indeed conventional wisdom, about the behaviour of interlocutors. However, Davidson claims

it is an error to suppose we have seen deeply into the heart of linguistic communication when we notice how society bends linguistic habits to a public norm.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> This is the theme of Davidson, 1986.

<sup>26</sup> Davidson, 1984b, p.278.

Of course, this is why Davidson believes *radical* interpretation best captures the essential character of linguistic understanding, concerning as it does what we *must* take into interpretation with us for interpretation to be *possible* - not a shared grasp of the conventional significance of words, no matter how familiar our interlocutors, but just that presumption of the structural isomorphism of what we call a language. 'Syntax', as he puts it, 'is so much more social than semantics'.<sup>27</sup>

In 'A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs', Davidson is more explicit about what he thinks it is that we share in understanding and communication. There he contrasts the *prior* theory, which captures what an interpreter knows in advance of some particular interpretative challenge and 'expresses how he is prepared in advance to interpret an utterance' (or, on the speaker's behalf, what he believes the interpreter's theory to be), with the *passing* theory, which expresses how he *does* interpret the utterance, and which is responsive to the flow of new information that emerges within the exchange. This latter concerns 'a changing list of proper names and a gerrymandered vocabulary', indeed 'every successful - i.e. correctly interpreted - use of any word or phrase' including malapropism, metaphor, neologism or whatever.<sup>28</sup> Evidently, neither corresponds to what we would normally call a language. The prior theories of speaker and interpreter need not coincide for communication to be successful, though it may be extremely useful if they largely do. The passing theory, on the other hand, makes no use of the idea of regularity, upon which the idea of conventional significance rests, since it is essentially synchronic.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p.279.

<sup>28</sup> Davidson, 1986, p.169.

Nevertheless it is the latter which is shared in successful communication, or rather which 'converges' in interpretation - the interpreter's theory coinciding with the theory the speaker intends him to use. What we must share for successful communication is thus not static, but transitory and fluid. Furthermore there is no formalising the nature of the strategies that take us from prior to passing theory, beyond 'wit, luck and wisdom'.

What is the upshot of Davidson's thinking here? Principally, that the philosophical concern with meaning as clarified in the process of radical interpretation ceases to support traditional conceptions of language mastery, appealing as they do to the idea of the prior internalisation of semantic rules or conventions. What we are to see instead is that interpretation requires only convergence in passing theory. An important caveat here: prior and passing theories are so-called, that is they are *theories*, precisely because of the requirement that the description of the competencies concerned be recursive (a la Tarski). So, Davidson is not to be seen as somehow revoking his earlier work on the form of a theory of meaning. His claim would be that it is just that, in order to communicate successfully, you do not need the same *prior* theory as your interlocutors.<sup>29</sup> Mrs Malaprop is hard work, but nevertheless she 'gets away with it', and more importantly, if Davidson is right, 'getting away with it' is in fact an ubiquitous feature of our actual speech practice. The suggestion is then that this serves notice on any interesting thesis of the normativity of language or meaning.

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<sup>29</sup> I think the reading of radical interpretation given above, which stresses the dynamic character of interpretation, sits quite comfortably with the notion of linguistic competence as generating passing theories.

A word about ‘getting away with it’. The envisaged scenario can be schematically represented as an interpretative exchange where:

- (i) an interpreter has a (prior) theory regarding an arbitrary utterance of the speaker;
- (ii) the speaker says something with the intention (and expectation) of being interpreted in such and such a manner, an interpretation which is *not* provided for in the interpreter’s theory;
- (iii) but the speaker is nevertheless understood - the speaker’s intended interpretation and the interpreter’s actual interpretation coincide.

If Davidson is right in claiming (and I take it that it is a perfectly serviceable empirical claim) that this scenario is in fact ubiquitous, that there is often a considerable discrepancy between how interpreters are antecedently disposed or prepared to interpret a speakers arbitrary utterance, and how, when communication is successful, they actually do end up interpreting them; if so, then his argument amounts to the persuasive claim that what takes an interpreter from (ii) to (iii), what Davidson calls a ‘passing theory’, is a better model of linguistic competence than those which *assume* agreement in interlocutors’ *prior* theories as necessary conditions for understanding some arbitrary utterance (and moreover, a model which appears to retain little of our ordinary understanding of ‘language mastery’).

Yet if linguistic understanding, modelled by radical interpretation, is largely fluid, and has nothing essentially to do with shared knowledge, what happens to the idea that

language is constitutively normative, and which appeared definitive of the Davidsonian position? Are we left with Simon Blackburn's memorable image of a speech community as just an aggregate of 'wooden' people, whose essential isolation is punctuated by moments of synchronicity? Normativity, as we saw in the last chapter, requires something more *viscous*.<sup>30</sup>

Secondly, according to the Davidsonian picture, injunctions to speak in some way, to use a word in thus and such a manner, apply *solely under conditions governing the motivation and intention of speakers to communicate effectively*. The general idea is that what we call 'meaning' simply crystallises around good ways of communicating.

Akeel Bilgrami puts the point thus:

The notion of correctness is *entirely* secondary to the desire and intention to communicate without causing strain, which underlies the notion of meaning.<sup>31</sup>

I do not believe this denies the very thought with which we began - that we cannot but place our interlocutors in a normative, that is rational, space; that, as I put it, interpretation takes place within normative horizons. Yet it is an anaemic sense in which *language* remains normative - specifically, in so far as it is a species of rational action. Language and meaning are normative in so far as token speech actions are rationalised by communicative intentions. So, in general:

If x wants to get it across that p, and believes  $\psi$ -ing will effectively get it across that p, then x ought to  $\psi$  (where  $\psi$  describes a speech act).

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<sup>30</sup> I lift the satisfying fluid/viscous metaphor from Ramberg, 1989. Blackburn discusses linguistic normativity in his 1980.

<sup>31</sup> Bilgrami, 1993, p.136

Supposing that 'saying that q' is a description of  $\psi$ , the argument is that there is no norm linking 'p' and 'q' (even where a strong regularity exists between communicating that p and saying that q, and we want to say that, in English, 'q' *means* p). Mrs Malaprop can achieve her communicative aims, albeit not without strain, by saying something else.<sup>32</sup>

What norms there are here concern what is reasonable to do given the desire to communicate. So, language is merely normative *qua* rational action. Bilgrami nicely sums up the Davidsonian view:

'Meanings are normative in the sense that a lot of other things might be - such as that I ought to take my umbrella if I don't want to get wet ....'<sup>33</sup>

10. My response is not to disagree with the pragmatic reorientation that Davidson urges.

That is, I agree with the following claims. First, meaning is an abstraction from cases of successful communication, and thus communication is key to how we understand

linguistic competence. Secondly, and relatedly, I want to endorse his rejection of the

conception of linguistic communication which appeals to a speaker's exercise of an

independently available semantic competence (grasp of rules or conventions). As

Ramberg puts it, 'the crucial significance of the radical-interpretation model of linguistic

communication lies in the fact that it reverses the logical priority of the concept of a

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<sup>32</sup> This does not entail the 'humpty dumpy' account of meaning - that words mean whatever the speaker wants or intends them to mean. If Davidson is right that 'getting away with it' is all important, this is crucially because it depends upon the speaker's being interpreted as she intends; and that, in turn, is a matter of convergence in the 'theory' of her words, so to speak. Mrs Malaprop gets away with it because, for example, 'epitaph' plays the (logico-syntactic) *role* of 'epithet' in the theory which correctly interprets her.

<sup>33</sup> Bilgrami, *op cit*, p.136.

language and the concept of interpretation’.<sup>34</sup> My own argument for this emerges in the next chapter, but I regard the view to be displaced - the view, that is, of language as an expressive resource available independently of its communicative deployment - as a consistent target of this thesis and its rejection as partly definitive of the form of pragmatism I endorse and elaborate (for example, it would be rejected by Wittgenstein as another incarnation of the view that meaning is modelled on ‘signs awaiting interpretation’). So, in the clarification of the kind of pragmatic turn we can be comfortable with, a lot is going to turn on getting the notion of communication right.

My aim is, as stated, to resist any slide from this reorientation to an anaemic view of linguistic normativity - the view that meaning and language are normative merely in so far as projects of interpretation operate within broadly normative horizons (that is, in accordance with constraints of rationality). I want to contest that inference by resisting the claim that there is only ever an *instrumental* relation between language and communicative intentions (as the primary locus of meaning). In subsequent chapters I argue for an account of linguistic communication which urges recognition of a *constitutive* relation between communicative aims and the linguistic means of achieving them.

For now, I want to disarm the concern that meaning is at best *extrinsically* normative, in virtue of being ‘entirely secondary to the desire to communicate without causing strain’. One might be tempted in this way to admit a degree of normativity in

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<sup>34</sup> Ramberg, op cit, p.109

matters of meaning, but claim that this offers merely extrinsic norms governing concepts and words, being just the heuristics governing general intelligibility. What is the significance of the distinction here? In the context of rationality the intrinsic/extrinsic distinction appears to hark back to that between categorical and hypothetical imperatives. What makes deductive rationality intrinsically normative, on this understanding, would then be the fact that it is has quite general, unconditional applicability - an applicability, more specifically, quite *independent of the intentions and motivations of those who are taken to instantiate it*. Language, in contrast, might then be thought to be extrinsically normative because injunctions to speak in some particular way, to use a word in such a manner, apply precisely under conditions governing motivations and intentions, such as a speaker being motivated by considerations of communicative ease; thus, those who *intend* to speak in that way, use a word thus, etc. ought to do so. They ('norms') attach to means of achieving communicative ends. So, one ought to employ concepts as one has in the past, one ought to speak as others do, *if one wants to be generally understood*. These 'norms' do not license particular prescriptions, since they concern the conditions merely for successful communication. They do not, the thought goes, apply at the level of words and concepts.

I argue first that no compelling distinction can be drawn vis-a-vis their normativity between formal, deductive exercises of rationality, and content-invoking, material rationality. Looking forward to subsequent chapters, I then argue that grounding claims that language mastery is not normative in considerations of the primacy of

communication trades on a non-compulsory (instrumentalist) view of linguistic communication.

11. One would be hard pressed to find dissenters to the claim that there are norms of deductive rationality. One ought to reason in accordance with *modus ponens*, for example. What, however, of content-based reasoning however, the kind that implicates a conceptual or semantic competence, i.e. a notion of non-logical, material inference? Briefly, the characteristic feature of these inferences would be that a competence in performing them turns upon a grasp of the conceptual content of the non-logical vocabulary - in effect, what, in the following inferences, 'table', 'red', 'to the right of', 'rain' and 'thunder' *mean*.<sup>35</sup>

'If x is a table then x is a medium sized object'

'If x is to the right of y then y is to the left of x'

'If it is raining then it will be wet outside'

'If there's lightning then there will be thunder'

The thought behind *inferentialist* strategies in semantics is that such a notion of material inference might be harnessed to provide a (normative) account of meaning. I will make much use of inferentialism at a later stage, but for now the details of any commitment to

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<sup>35</sup> I am aware that these appear quite heterogeneous, covering apparently analytic as well as causal inferences. But the notion of material inference, as used by Brandom and Sellars for example, is really very broad. For Sellars, they involve the kind of subjunctive conditionals that are basic to science, encoding general dependencies.

it are not overly important. What I am interested in at present is the attempt to try and draw a line around the notion of formal inference with respect to its normativity.

One might contend that whereas a formal inferential competence unquestionably involves government by norms, *material* inferential competence does not; it merely amounts to a general holism governing one's concepts. Furthermore, the Davidsonian concept of interpretative charity does not provide for conceptual or lexical *norms*, since it does not prescribe *particular* conceptual liaisons - concerning what one should believe or say - only that there will be *some* conceptual overlap between interpreter and interpretee. In just this vein, Akeel Bilgrami argues that a normativity of meaning lobby<sup>36</sup> have tended to obscure the role of considerations of rationality:

I believe that a number of philosophers have unconsciously run together (or at any rate assumed an easy extension of) the undeniable normativity that attaches to the principles of logic and what they take unjustifiably to be the normativity ('rules') governing the meaning of words.<sup>37</sup>

Specifically, Bilgrami's objection to material inference 'rules' having the status of norms is that, unlike formal rules of inference, they do not admit of 'stable codifications'. Evidently, one person's concept of *rain* need not have the same material inferential liaisons as another's (although they will have to have at least *some* liaisons according to Bilgrami). Material rationality is a competence which is, he claims, expressible as a mere general holism - if you have some concepts, you must have some related others.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Amongst whom he includes Kripke, Burge and McDowell.

<sup>37</sup> Bilgrami, *op cit*, p.134.

<sup>38</sup> In fact, this holism is presented by Davidson as an empirical fact, rather than a norm. So if you have one concept, you will have others.

However, I want to argue that even granted that there is no fixed range of inferences that I must endorse in order to have, for example, the concept *rain* - that is, even if there aren't necessary and sufficient possession conditions for the concept - that does not mean that there aren't norms governing my concept, that there are no inferences involving it that I ought to endorse. Indeed it is *precisely* my relation to those inferences which are *good* inferences which makes it the concept that it is and is taken to be.<sup>39</sup> So, contra Bilgrami, the idea of this 'material' rationality is *not* just that, in order to have some concept, I have to have some others, viz. just *any* others.

A good illustration of the point here is to reflect upon a general inferentialist account of conceptual content.<sup>40</sup> This can be represented, after Dummett, as an account of content which involves giving both the appropriate circumstances and the consequences of applying some concept. So, for example, we give the meaning of logical constants by specifying *introduction* rules giving the appropriate circumstances and *elimination* rules giving the consequences of their application. Now the idea of this broadly inferential relation being potentially meaning-constituting is a matter of determining the use of the concept in question in a way which preserves what Dummett calls a 'harmony' between the circumstances and consequences of its application. I think this is an ineliminably *normative* notion. It is precisely this harmony which is absent from the case of Prior's celebrated 'runabout inference ticket' - the logical constant 'tonk', which is defined in terms of the introduction rule for disjunction (from A |- A tonk B) and the elimination

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<sup>39</sup> I.e. on the basis of which others attribute it (or withhold attribution, if I don't).

<sup>40</sup> I shall have more to say about inferentialism in chapter 6.

rule for conjunction (from  $A \text{ tonk } B \mid\!-\! B$ ), and which licenses  $A \mid\!-\! B$ .<sup>41</sup> What prevents the introduction of this concept into a language is precisely the fact that it fails to underwrite a notion of good inference. Harmony is thus the requirement for the normative integrity of a language.<sup>42</sup>

But this is not just the case for formal languages. In the case of non-logical, material inferences, the requirement for ‘harmony’ is just as acute, particularly in the absence of necessary and sufficient conditions for the introduction of some non-logical concept. How can I ascribe a belief to someone without evidence of the specifically *normative* integrity of the system of their beliefs? Unlike mere holism, this places substantive constraints upon the ascription of conceptual contents - not that one performs some inferences, but that one actually endorse some good inferences containing them.

Of course, as Bilgrami is aware, there is a construal of the point that it is not just *any* other concepts which an interpretee must be interpreted as having, which is familiar to the Davidsonian. There is indeed a range of concepts/beliefs an interpretee must have/endorse, viz. *a subset of the interpreter’s own*. This is the injunction that there be what Bilgrami calls ‘conceptual overlap’ between interpreter and interpretee, which is essentially the Davidsonian idea of charity I discussed earlier. As a precondition of interpretation, it has a good claim to licensing *normative* claims about the concepts ascribed (e.g. in order to be interpreted as having concept  $\alpha$ , you should have (some of) concepts  $\beta \dots \phi$ ). But this would be misleading, according to Bilgrami, since the

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<sup>41</sup> See Prior, 1960.

<sup>42</sup> The notion of inferential harmony is discussed by Brandom, 1994, pp.124-130.

requirement for conceptual overlap is merely an injunction to interpret on the basis of an assumed general agreement in concepts/beliefs, a tool precisely too coarse grained to license norms at the level of *particular* conceptual connections.

But the claim of conceptual overlap, that to be interpretable as having/deploying some concept one must share some other concepts/beliefs with the interpreter, is clearly not the same as the claim that in order to be interpretable as having some concept, one actually endorse some good inferences containing it; that one's concepts be, in Dummett's sense, harmonious. Can we say that failures to endorse particular material inferences constitute violations of norms governing the concepts involved? Well, such failures, if they are not to preclude ascription of certain concepts, engender obligations to endorse other *good* inferences. Their uncodifiability, as Bilgrami puts it, seems beside the point *vis-a-vis* their normative status; and thus, so is distinguishing deductive from 'material' rationality in this respect.

What then of the primacy of communication? Doesn't this have the consequence that meaning is not really normative, save for the sense that a lot of other things are, like putting up one's umbrella in the rain, that is, in so far as words service our non-linguistic aims?

12. We are perhaps familiar with a certain model of the role of communicative intentions in an account of linguistic meaning owing principally to Grice, and which I think contributes to the suspicions regarding the tenability of the thesis of distinctly linguistic

normativity. Meaning, the Gricean quite rightly points out, is a characteristic of the *use* of linguistic expressions, but, distinctively, their use in communicating a speaker's non-linguistic intentions to an audience. The primary communicative mechanism for the Gricean is the speaker inducing a belief in the hearer by means of the hearer's recognition of his (the speaker's) intention so to do.<sup>43</sup>

This offers what I earlier called an *instrumentalist* view of the nature of linguistic communication - that the communicative use of language is, in the first instance, a matter of servicing an individual's ends in getting a hearer to do (typically, *believe*) something, in the linguistic case, by means of their utterance embodying an intention so to do. Ease of communication so conceived offers a primarily *strategic* rationale for behaving in ways which will conform to the expectations of one's audience, and to general maxims of rational exchanges (concerning relevance, for example). Moreover, the primary communicative intentions are not specifically *linguistic*. Language as a communicative resource is thus, on this view, a medium for the fulfilment of strategic aims; it is essentially *vehicular*.<sup>44</sup>

It is hardly surprising that in the context of an instrumentalist view of communication, wherein words become mere tools in the strategic service of our ends, that a thought about the normativity of language should drop out of the picture. What I

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<sup>43</sup> The nicest illustration comes from Grice, 1957. I may show Mr X a photo of Mrs X and Mr Y with the intention of getting him to believe that they are over familiar. Or I may draw a picture of the same. Only the latter involves a Gricean intention, and could be said to 'mean' that they are over familiar.

<sup>44</sup> Of course, there is a trivial sense in which communication must be a vehicle, since it is a matter of the communication *of something*. The contrast I have in mind is with the idea of a *constitutive* relation between communicative aims and the linguistic means of achieving them. See chapter 5, #6.

am seeking, I want to suggest, is a non-Gricean account of communication; specifically, an account which does not assimilate linguistic communication to an all-purpose model of strategic action. I want to defend the view that there is a distinctly *linguistic* kind of communication; one that is not primarily vehicular. That is, I will argue for a kind of communicative competence which is a matter of distinctly linguistic accomplishments. I leave detailed discussion of this alternative until subsequent chapters, save to anticipate that an alternative framework can be developed from within a pragmatic tradition that emerges in tandem with Grice's own - namely speech act theory. The primacy of (non-vehicular) communication to an account of language and meaning, does not, I will need to show, undermine their normativity.

The principal objection to the Gricean analysis of meaning in terms of a speaker's non-linguistic intentions is epistemological. It makes the process of successful speech involve an implausible wariness on the part of interlocutors, who are obliged to keep tabs on each other's higher order intentions. Why implausible? Quite simply because understanding speech is characteristically an *unreflective* accomplishment. If in this way interlocutors can and do by and large take each other's linguistic behaviour at face value, then it cannot be that possession of complex intentions of the envisaged sort be necessary conditions of meaningful speech. Of course a *theory* of language may well have recourse to structural and conceptual complexities that appear to falsify the (here, unreflective) phenomenology of native understanding of language, but this is peculiarly a problem for

a theory that attributes such complexity to the *intentions* of speakers and which thereby distorts the epistemology of language.

Returning to Davidson, there is a sense in his work that communication is a matter of getting beyond language, getting past it to the intentions behind the words. What matters to communication is that the hearer spot the intention behind the performance. As the case of 'getting away with it' is really the standard case, there is a danger that we make language, quite implausibly, *opaque*. It is an objection of some force to point out that this makes communication a matter of guesswork.<sup>45</sup>

As such, the Davidsonian view is potentially vulnerable to an epistemological objection similar to that levelled at Grice, as I will now show. Coming full circle, it is perhaps not surprising to remark that there are similarities in the basic picture of what is involved in understanding language between Quine and the Davidsonian picture portrayed here. Not of course that a Davidsonian espouses Quine's behaviourist *premises*. However, in so far as, on his later views, the homophonic case and the heterophonic case are on a continuum, rather than on opposing sides of any *philosophically* interesting divide, the basic picture of what is involved in 'sharing a language' - nothing save contingent similarities in our behavioural exteriors and in our interpretative strategies - seems pretty close. According to this, my interpretative encounters with one whose 'language' I do not know (say someone speaking Arabic) - the heterophonic case - are not fundamentally different - that is, in a way that might interest a philosopher - from those

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<sup>45</sup> See Dummett, 1989, and Hacking, 1986.

with one with whom I would be described as ‘sharing a language’ - the homophonic case (although of course our exchanges will be massively *easier* in the latter). Evidently, I *can* understand the Arabic speaker on occasion. Understanding what he ‘means’ in the sense of what he is getting at, does not require that we do speak the same, provided I can generate some sort of ad hoc theory which interprets his words. Indeed, in this sense of generating passing theories, *none* of us speak the same. So, the suggestion is, it is all about *ease* of interpretation, which happens to be facilitated if we linguistically behave similarly.<sup>46</sup>

However, there is a very real danger in this view that we become saddled with an epistemology which many would, I think rightly, reject. This portrays understanding as a kind of divining of the communicative intentions which lie behind the surface similarities/dissimilarities between interlocutors. The epistemology this opposes, and which I think is deeply attractive, is one to which I have alluded and which we can put in terms of McDowell’s thought that when we understand someone’s speech, we legitimately take them ‘at face value’; that we, as it were, perceive their meanings. The central thought is of a piece with disjunctivism in contemporary epistemology – that the veracity of our understanding doesn’t turn on our having got behind the ‘surface’ to establish (or rule out) some hidden determinant of meaning (such as speaker’s higher-order intentions), any more than the veracity of our perceptions, when accurate, turns on our having satisfactorily established in a scepticism-defeating manner the appropriateness

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<sup>46</sup> The question has to be raised of course what this sense of ‘speak’ is, such that it is true to say that none of us speak the same.

of their causal history. Meaning, like the world, is open to view, and is common property as McDowell might, plausibly, say.<sup>47</sup>

The value of appeals to a shared linguistic competence is just this, that it creates the opportunity to put us *in direct, unmediated contact with another's meanings, and thus their thoughts and intentions*.<sup>48</sup> So, although I have suggested that we need to concede with Davidson that a certain gloss on 'sharing a language' ceases to take centre stage in a philosophical account of meaning and understanding, we need to honour the epistemology that makes it seem necessary. In effect, although I agree that we cannot squeeze semantic normativity out of the *locutionary* portion of language, I argue that more can be done in this regard by shifting to the *illocutionary* than Davidson or Bilgrami countenance. So, if there are fewer locutionary constraints on meaning that p than we hoped when we started talking about language mastery - that, for example, Mrs Malaprop can assert that this is a nice arrangement of epithets without saying 'this is a nice arrangement of epithets' - my claim is that we can look to the conditions upon specifically *illocutionary* acts of meaning that p to head off the drift toward the demise of the thesis of linguistic normativity.

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<sup>47</sup> See in particular McDowell, 1981a, particularly where he likens semantic understanding to a form of perceptual ability.

<sup>48</sup> Wittgenstein is alive to this, for the unmediated character of understanding (even third personal) is clearly a central point in the rule-following considerations.

## 5.

1. Continuing with the theme of communication in an account of meaning, I seek in this chapter to develop an appropriate framework for the theory of language within which the kind of pragmatic turn I have been discussing can be reconciled with a commitment to the claim that, as language users, we are distinguished by the normativity of the competencies involved. I argue for two desiderata of theories of language. The first, taking up from the discussion of the last chapter, asserts the centrality of communication to an account of meaning. The second, which I have introduced as a corrective to an instrumentalist view, insists that the notion of communication offered reflect upon a distinctly *linguistic* competence; that is, be revealed as a matter of essentially linguistic accomplishments.<sup>1</sup> With these in view, I assess the treatment of language use in two principal semantic traditions. I show that neither tradition adequately meets these constraints. I then argue for a framework which does.

My strategy for motivating the framework I favour makes use of a challenge to theorists of language, and in particular those in the dominant tradition of formal semantics, to address themselves to the phenomenon of communication. Specifically, this challenge, owing in part to Strawson, is to develop an account of meaning which does not implausibly bifurcate language mastery into separable expressive and communicative

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<sup>1</sup> In contrast, what distinguishes the sense of communication relevant to the study of meaning for the Gricean is the possession by communicating parties of complex intentionality.

components.<sup>2</sup> Endorsing the challenge as an expression of the desiderata for which I have argued, I show that despite the development of so-called bipartite accounts of meaning, which attempt to offer accounts of language use in terms of a theory of force additional to the formal (expressive) core theory, formal semanticists fail the challenge. Typically, in trying to accommodate communication in the theory of meaning, they fail to meet the second desideratum: like the Gricean they render communication an essentially extra-linguistic accomplishment.

I then argue that in speech act theory, and in particular its Austinian formulation, we have a framework better suited to developing an account of linguistic competence which meets our desiderata. I argue that the notion of the illocutionary speech act is key to a conception of language use which is communicative in its very nature and yet remains a matter of essentially linguistic accomplishments. In terms made familiar by the formal semanticist, I argue for a notion of force which applies to speakers *qua speakers*; a notion, that is, of *illocutionary* force. One of the principal benefits of this shift is that the notion of the illocutionary can underwrite the unreflectiveness characteristic of understanding speech.

Finally, I find support for the shift to an illocutionary notion of speech acts, perhaps somewhat surprisingly, in McDowell's defence of formal semantics against Strawson's challenge. I end with a discussion of the potential usefulness of the Austinian

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<sup>2</sup> As I mentioned in the last chapter, this is a view which I regard as a consistent target of the thesis, and of the kind of pragmatism I favour. Its rejection is part of the common thread linking the view I endorse to Wittgenstein and Davidson.

framework with respect to my broader concerns. (In particular, I argue that this framework does not simply recapitulate the basic divisions of labour in the theory of language, and in so doing offers a point of contact with the notion of communicative rationality by which I will seek to deal with the question of normativity.)

2. The discussion of the last chapter threw up two main themes: the question of the relation between communicative success and the idea of having or mastering a language; and the question of the extent to which interpretation requires (to one degree or another) a prior conception of the psychological characteristics of those we interpret. Differences in opinion on the adequacy of the philosophical treatment of meaning understood in broadly Davidsonian terms - that is, understood in terms of radical interpretation - were seen to turn on these questions. I characterised a pragmatic reorientation in the approach to meaning in terms of particular responses to these questions, involving (i) an inversion of the traditional view of the relation between language and interpretation; and (ii) a minimal reading of the extent to which interpretation is bent to fit prior conceptions of speakers' psychology. I was happy to endorse this reorientation, but looked to resist the inference to the claim that language is thereby not normative. This charges me with developing a version of the pragmatic turn which is consistent with the claim that, as language users, we are distinguished by the normativity of the competencies involved.

These themes provide us with what I regard as desiderata upon an adequate philosophical theory of language:

- (i) that the theory connects the possession by expressions of linguistic meaning with the communicative intentions and practices of actual speakers;
- (ii) that this connection nevertheless be a direct reflection of speakers' *linguistic* competence.

The first embodies commitment to developing an account of meaning as part of an overall theory of linguistic behaviour, and in particular to seeing meaning as the product of a certain range of our practical activities. What is distinctive is the claim that these practices and the intentions they fulfil are in some way essentially *communicative*.

The second asserts that the relevant sense of communication here is a matter of speakers' essentially *linguistic* accomplishments (rather than, say their possession of complex intentions). I have two motivations for this. Firstly, there is the epistemological motivation introduced in the last chapter to underwrite the unreflective nature of understanding speech. Secondly, there is the more general motivation to make good the thought that linguistic competence is normative, which I look to develop (in chapters 6 and 7) in terms of a notion of communicative rationality which is essentially *discursive*.

As I argued in the last chapter, significant disagreement in the philosophical treatment of meaning tends to surround theorists' differing commitments on how the psychological, pragmatic and semantic components of their theories interact. The question of the extent to which appeal has to be made to the psychological context of linguistic behaviour in

order to solve what, on the model of radical translation, are the ‘simultaneous equations’<sup>3</sup> of interpretation, is of a piece with the question of the scope of *linguistic* inquiry proper.

The desiderata above really issue two challenges. The challenge from one direction (primarily to the formal semanticist in the mould of Davidson, 1984g) is to show how the rather thin and uninterpretative deliverances of a truth-theory can be seen to yield appropriate descriptions of language use (or more generally, to demonstrate how the theory of meaning, on this conception, connects with an account of linguistic behaviour). The challenge from the other direction is to show how our ability to lit upon richer and properly interpretative descriptions of linguistic behaviour - that is, descriptions of fully communicative linguistic acts - is part and parcel of our *linguistic* competence, our unreflective capacity to understand and produce speech. I argue that neither formal semantics nor communication-intention theory manages to offer conceptions of language use which avoid the Scylla of failing to deliver an appropriately rich notion of (communicative) language use, and the Charybdis of making communication a matter of primarily extra-linguistic accomplishments.

I have already argued against the Gricean communication-intention theory that it fails the second of these challenges, but I will take a moment to recap. The Gricean project is motivated by an acknowledgement of our first desideratum - in particular that meaningfulness is a function of an essentially communicative mechanism. In this way,

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<sup>3</sup> See Evans and McDowell’s introduction to their 1976. The idea of interpretation involving the solution of ‘simultaneous equations’ recapitulates the holism (and the interdependency of belief and meaning) that confronts the radical interpreter.

the Gricean posits the intention to induce belief *by means of the hearer's recognition of the speaker's intentions* as central to a signal being, in a sense relevant to the study of language, meaningful.<sup>4</sup> In effect, communication works via the fulfilment of *higher-order* intentions, viz. intentions that intentions be recognised. In its standard formulation, an utterance's meaning that p involves the speaker's possession of a complex (three-part) intention - the intention to get the hearer to believe something with the content that p; the intention that the hearer recognise that intention; and that this recognition be (at least among) the hearer's reason(s) for believing that p. In addition, many commentators have (tellingly, I think<sup>5</sup>) seen the need to posit a further condition, to avoid regressive chains of intentions - to the effect that no intentions are concealed (i.e. there must be no intention that an intention not be recognised).

I have argued that this model fails to underwrite an appropriate epistemology of language. It cannot serve as a notion of communication relevant to the clarification of *linguistic meaning*, not if understanding language is by and large unreflective. It just cannot be that successfully executed speech requires interlocutors to keep tabs on each others' higher-order intentions. Secondly, in assimilating communication to cases of strategic action - of, primarily, achieving the effect of inducing certain effects in one's interlocutor - the Gricean view offers an instrumentalist account of linguistic

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<sup>4</sup> This is what Grice (1957) calls 'non-natural meaning'. Recall that my showing Mr X a photo of Mrs X and Mr Y fails to be meaningful (where my drawing an image of the same does not) precisely because his recognition of my intention to get him to believe that they are over familiar is *irrelevant* to my achieving the intended effect.

<sup>5</sup> 'Tellingly' because it marks a belated acknowledgement of the transparency of understanding speech. Of course, it is committed to seeing this, most implausibly, as a distinct intention (or at least as something which has to be legislated for).

communication which maintains that there is a strategic rationale to behaving in ways which conform to regularities of language use. Not that this is wrong as an account of the *purpose* of language. Of course language is embedded in the context of the strategic pursuit of non-linguistic aims.<sup>6</sup> However, it really precludes the kind of notion of communicative rationality that might sustain a viable thesis of *linguistic* normativity. I return to Grice in the last section of this chapter.

3. I now turn to the question of how language use is treated in the dominant tradition of formal semantics. The formal semanticist is best captured in terms of commitment to some form of *compositionality thesis*, as illustrated here by Davidson:

It is conceded by most philosophers of language, and recently by some linguists, that a satisfactory theory of meaning must give an account of how the meanings of sentences depend upon the meanings of words. Unless such an account could be supplied for a particular language, it is argued, there would be no explaining the fact that we can learn a language: no explaining the fact that, on mastering a finite vocabulary and a finitely stated set of rules, we are prepared to produce and to understand any of a potential infinitude of sentences.<sup>7</sup>

Language is evidently both learnable and creative. A competent language user is able to understand and produce an infinite number of sentences, the majority of which are entirely novel to the language user. Our grasp must then consist, at least in part, in our ability to manipulate a learnable system of symbol composition and comprehension; an expressive repertoire, so to speak. According to the formal semanticist, knowing a language, in this sense of an expressive resource, is best represented in terms of an

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<sup>6</sup> I return to this below, in discussing Austin's distinction between the perlocutionary and the illocutionary.

<sup>7</sup> Davidson, 1984g, p.17.

axiomatisable theory or model<sup>8</sup>, which demonstrates how the wholes systematically and generatively depend upon the manipulation of the parts. Thereby, the description of a finite, generative competence explains a speaker's non-finite performance. Secondly, the notion of the 'parts' of language thus made sense of is required, according to the formal semanticist, to capture a natural language's inferentially expressive power - that is, its logical form.

Put more schematically, linguistic competence on the formal account concerns our (generative) ability to pair sentences of a language with interpretations. Informally, a theory reflecting this should enable the pairing of descriptions of uninterpreted vocalisations (or inscriptions) meeting certain phonetic and syntactic requirements of well-formedness with descriptions of the speech (or written) acts thereby performed. So, schematically, the theory enables one to move from P's to R's:

(P) A uttered 's'

(R) A said that p.

According to such a schema, the theory of meaning for a language specifies the contents of what is said, i.e. of sayings enabled by utterances of its sentences.<sup>9</sup> Formally, this is effected by the theory yielding theorems of the form 's'...p' for any sentence s of the language. It is the truth conditional theorist's contention that these theorems ought to

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<sup>8</sup> As to the psychological reality of the theory, this is a further issue.

<sup>9</sup> See McDowell, 1976 and 1980.

conform (amongst other things, in the interests of compositionality) to the theorems of a Tarski-style truth-theory, and thus what fills the lacuna be 'is true if and only if'.<sup>10</sup>

This schema indicates how the connection between the intuitive notion of meaning and a formalisable notion such as truth conditions derives from their mutual links with the notion of the content of speech acts. However, this obscures the point that what one achieves by way of formal tractability, one seems in danger of losing in terms of scope. For the schema as thus presented seems only to extend to utterances describable as sayings that p - that is to a language's indicative sentences. So the price of this tractability is the delimitation of a formal theory to a language's indicative core.

However, far from discouraging the formal semanticist, this delimitation of the formal theory can be seen as servicing a distinction that she will insist upon. This distinction is typically characterised as a distinction between meaning and *force*. The notion of force concerns the use to which an utterance of some linguistic expression is put - as an assertion, promise, command, request etc. It marks an acknowledgement of the intuition that knowing the meaning, in some restricted sense, of a sentence underdetermines its use as a fully fledged speech act. This follows quite naturally from the observation that I can with the same sentence assert that Denmark has rights to Schleswig-Holstein, inquire whether Denmark has rights to Schleswig-Holstein, declare that Denmark has rights to Schleswig-Holstein, bemoan that Denmark has rights to Schleswig-Holstein, etc. There is, then, a sense in which the 'meaning' is invariant across

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<sup>10</sup> A fuller account of the idea of a truth-theory as a meaning theory (the core theory of a theory of interpretation) is given in chapter 4.

these different contexts of use; a feature which a meaning/force distinction is apt to capture.

Moreover, given the notion of a structural ‘core’ in an account of meaning which compositionality expresses, the virtue of the notion of force, as distinguished from meaning, is precisely the idea that the ‘parts’ thus made sense of (e.g. ‘Denmark’, ‘has rights’) *make a uniform semantic contribution* to the wholes in which they may figure (that is, as the contents of speech acts). The distinction between sense, or meaning, and force would appear to go hand in hand with the idea of some central meaning-relevant property which attaches to the constituent parts of language.<sup>11</sup> A theory of force is then charged with mapping the relations between sentences, or functions thereof, and uses.

Where meaning is formally tractable, we should perhaps not expect force to provide for a systematic theory. There is good reason for this, and which is the price of the autonomy of meaning from use to which the formal semanticist appeals. There may be, it seems, no constraint upon the *form* of words one uses to perform a particular speech act. For example, I can, in the right circumstances, order you with the form of a question. (‘Is that a cigarette?’ uttered in a no smoking area). Such examples, on reflection, proliferate.

Nevertheless, even if force may be regarded as resisting formal tractability, the formal semanticist still owes some characterisation of how language use ramifies in the core portion of her account. If ‘use’ is not, in some sense, codified in the core theory; if,

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<sup>11</sup> See Dummett, 1973, chapter 10.

that is, one's expressive capability is not systematically tailored to the performance of specific speech acts, then such an account cannot be considered a model of natural language competence, and so we lose one motivation for positing a core. Consequently, the formal semanticist needs to follow Davidson's advice and 'consider force in the only form in which ... it is a feature of sentences, that is as it serves to distinguish the *moods*'.<sup>12</sup> So, can a theory of truth explain the differences among the moods?

An affirmative answer might take any one of a number of forms, for example reducing non-indicatives to indicatives (explicit performatives)<sup>13</sup>, or offering a paratactic analysis which may treat mood indicating devices as sentences or operators respectively.<sup>14</sup> The point, quite generally, is to demonstrate the semantical tractability of moods (other than the indicative). Such an achievement, in rendering mood part of the core of the theory, would go some of the way in meeting worries about scope and the role of formal theories vis-a-vis language use. Conversely, as Davidson notes, if 'standard theory of truth can be shown to be incapable of explaining mood, then truth theory is inadequate as a general theory of language'.<sup>15</sup>

So the treatment of mood is considered central to the credentials of a formal semantics as a component of general theory of language, i.e. the formal tractability of mood establishes some sense of the formal tractability of language use (mood being the 'form in which ..[use or force]... is a feature of sentences'); it is where questions of

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<sup>12</sup> Davidson, 1984h, p.115.

<sup>13</sup> David Lewis (1972) and McGinn (1977).

<sup>14</sup> Davidson (1984h) and Hornsby (1986).

<sup>15</sup> Davidson, 1984h, p.116.

logical form and questions of concepts of language use come into closest contact. I shall not, however, dwell on these issues, since I want to get on to a challenge which has something of the flavour of a pre-emptive strike.

4. Strawson's paper 'Meaning and Truth'<sup>16</sup> is an attempt to resolve what he takes to be the conflict between formal semantics and the communication-intention theory associated principally with Grice, by clarifying the challenge which the phenomenon of communication poses for semantic theory. The formal theorist can be characterised, as above, in terms of a commitment to a certain gloss on the idea of the autonomy of meaning - specifically, that an account of meaning for a language is given by specifying a formal (axiomatic) *core* theory: here a Tarski-style truth theory.

Strawson's central contention is that although importantly right in certain respects, truth-conditional theories cannot make out an adequate notion of linguistic meaning without appeal to the kind of complex communicative intentions posited by the Gricean. The central argument appears to be that the relevance of the notion of truth to an account of meaning derives from the fundamental connection between a sentence's meaning something and its being the content of a certain kind of speech act (expressing a belief, saying something that is put forward as true, or asserting) *and that an adequate account of such acts cannot fail to make reference to a concept of communication-intention*. This being so, neither can the basic analysis of a sentence's meaning. The first

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<sup>16</sup> Strawson, 1990.

part of Strawson's argument - that it is only by dint of the notion of doing something with an expression, of the *use* of an expression, that we have an explanation of why a *truth*-theory might do service as a *meaning*-theory - reworks the suggestion that the theorist (of whatever persuasion) has to give an account of what sentences are *for*. As Strawson makes clear, it is only with this pragmatic point in view that we can understand the connection here between meaning and truth that the formal semanticist exploits.<sup>17</sup>

The second part of Strawson's argument, which issues the challenge with which I am largely concerned, outlines what is required for an account of such speech acts - specifically, for Strawson, appeal to the communicative intentions of the kind Grice introduces into the basic analysis of linguistic meaning. Like Grice, Strawson envisages speech acts, such as the paradigmatic assertion, as essentially involving communicative - that is, audience/interlocutor-invoking - intentions, rather than as some compound of an intentional component and some bare notion of belief expression. For the formal semanticist may seek to accommodate the point about use, in terms of her notion of a core formal theory, by appeal to a basic kind of linguistically meaningful act purged of all essential connection with communication-intention; and expressing a belief may be thought to be the just the thing (at least in the primary case of assertion). For example, the

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<sup>17</sup> Of course, Tarski established the formal suitability of the truth predicate to semantic theorising, but the point Strawson is making, I take it, is that without the connection to the use speakers make of expressions we would have no idea *why* the truth predicate should replace 'means that' and thus no reason to think it was the meaning or semanticity of expressions that was being mapped by the biconditionals of the theory. Similar thoughts are to be found in Dummett's discussion of assertion and the Fregean concept of force in chapter 10 of his 1973.

formal semanticist may allow the thought that the basic unit of semantic analysis is a kind of *act*, but attempt to characterise this in communication-independent terms.

However, Strawson insists that the connections between assertion, the expression of belief, and communicative intentions are *conceptual* ones, and claims that we cannot thus make good sense of a communication-independent notion of belief expression. The thought here can be seen as a threatened *reductio* of the formal semanticist's attempt to accommodate the pragmatic point - specifically, that an account of linguistic meaning which hives off the communicative component of speech acts from some core notion of (for Strawson, *belief*) expression is committed to making sense of the possibility of someone's being linguistically competent in the sense of being able to express beliefs (or voice thoughts), but without the ability to do anything like assert things.<sup>18</sup>

There is a general issue here which is not confined to the matter of 'conceptual connections' (which I do not believe issue in a relevant notion of communicative intentions anyway<sup>19</sup>), and which I want to exploit. The charge of incoherence that is forceful here does not concern the possibility of meaning and communication coming apart on occasion (of course I can say something and not be heard), but rather attaches to any bifurcation of the *competencies* here - that is, to a characterisation of what it is to be able to do meaningful things, i.e. to say something, which is specifiable independently of what it is to engage communicatively, e.g. to assert something. The charge is that one ought not regard possession of a language as an expressive resource (modelled by a

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<sup>18</sup> This characterisation of Strawson's challenge I owe to Hornsby (1998).

<sup>19</sup> See section # 6 below.

formal theory) available independently of the ability to communicate. Indeed, such thoughts gain currency through a kind of lowest common denominator thinking about meaning (analogous to arguments from error in epistemology). There are cases of ‘meaning without communication’, so meaning must be characterisable independently of communication.<sup>20</sup>

But the idea of a linguistic competence extending only as far as an ability to produce meaningful noises is one of seriously dubious coherence, embodying what Strawson termed a ‘bogus arithmetic of concepts’ of meaning and communication.<sup>21</sup> Saying something *just is* what is apt, on occasion, for asserting, stating, asking something. One can give no good sense to the idea of a capacity to express things independently of a capacity to communicate.

5. One might very well balk at the adversarial character Strawson gives to the debate between his protagonists (‘the Homeric struggle’), pointing to more recent elaborations of formal semantics which seem to involve concessions to the theorist of communication-intention in the development of bipartite theories of meaning. Indeed, the already heralded introduction of the notion of a theory of force into the formal semanticist picture can be usefully seen as an acknowledgement of the need to see a theory of meaning in the wider context of an account of language use.

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<sup>20</sup> This sort of argument can be found in the recent writings of Searle. See his 1983 and 1986. I look at Searle on communication in chapter 7.

<sup>21</sup> Strawson, *op cit*, p.99.

To reiterate, the dominant trend<sup>22</sup> sees the theory of meaning as *one* component of a wider project of interpreting the behaviour of language users, and which as Hornsby puts it, thereby ‘contributes to the explication of the notion of linguistic meaning by locating it with respect to a range of *other* concepts that have application to speakers’.<sup>23</sup> As I have noted, the theory of *force* plays a central role in linking the semantic components of the theory of truth-conditions with the components of the account of language use, via an account of mood. Specifically the theory is envisaged as setting out which utterances of sentences are formally (i.e. syntactically) apt for the performance of which speech acts. For example, the theory will state that an utterance of a sentence *p* in the indicative mood will be apt, on occasion, for asserting that *p*. For languages with moods other than the indicative, the theory has to specify transformations of utterances into a semantically tractable form - a form in which they are semantically interpretable by the theory of sense, viz. as indicative mood sentences.

Of course, the aim of interpretation is to deliver more than this - specifically, descriptions of actual interpreted speech acts, such that if the input to the theory is some verbal behaviour describable as ‘A uttered *s*’ (where *s* is some uninterpreted object-language expression), the output is the interpreted ‘A  $\psi$ -ed that *p*’ (and where  $\psi$  is a speech act verb - assert, ask, promise etc. and where *p* is an expression in the language of the theory which translates *s*).<sup>24</sup> Other concepts are required as part of the empirical base

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<sup>22</sup> That in the broadly Davidsonian tradition.

<sup>23</sup> Hornsby, 1998, p.3 (my emphasis).

<sup>24</sup> See Platts, 1979, pp.59-67.

of the theory - that is, as part of that with which the deliverances of the theory of sense combine to yield testable interpretations. These are typically the concepts of the propositional attitudes which are connected to attributions of speech acts. So, the deliverances are to be tested against whether they issue in appropriate ascriptions of propositional attitudes to speakers, (and, of course, in the light of observable circumstances). Understanding 'appropriate' here requires some conceptual/folk psychological analysis. So, one who asserts that *p*, for example, will typically believe that *p*, intend an audience to recognise this, and thus not seek to deceive the audience, etc. More generally, we can imagine folk psychological profiles constitutive of believing, desiring etc. These bundles of psychological conditions for the performance of speech acts form part of the testable consequences of the theory of meaning. Meeting this 'propositional attitude constraint' emphasises the now familiar Davidsonian point that the project of interpretation is to provide *simultaneously* a theory of meaning and a theory of belief (and propositional attitudes generally).

A bipartite theory can then be seen as at least offering a partial rapprochement - although different from that envisaged by Strawson - between the formal and intentionalist perspectives since the notion of force is supported by concepts of propositional attitudes, tracing as it does the conceptual connections between propositional attitudes and speech acts of various kinds. But does this meet Strawson's challenge to avoid 'bogus' accounts which extrude communication from the analysis of

linguistic meaning? I think that the bipartite model comes uncoupled from an account of *competence*.

My claim now is that a Strawsonian objection to the *extra-linguisticness* of communication on the formal account remains essentially in place despite the institution of the bipartite theory of meaning. Indeed, the suggestion is that the bipartite account succumbs to an analogous ‘bogus arithmetic of concepts’ - specifically the exclusion of communication from an account of basic linguistic competence. It is precisely the *otherness* of the concepts that sustain the notion of force on the bipartite model - the concepts of propositional attitudes, that is, which determine the descriptions of speech acts - that leads me to think that the error Strawson locates with the ‘original’ formal semanticist is being recapitulated.

It might be said that it is nevertheless the *combined* theory of sense and force which yields meaning, and that the bifurcation of sense and force does not rework the bifurcation of meaning and communication that lies at the heart of Strawson’s initial disquiet. However, the real thrust of that disquiet, and which lies behind accusations of ‘bogusness’, concerns, as I suggested earlier, the implausible *bifurcation of competencies*. On Strawson’s account, communicative intentions fix the content of utterances, whereas on the formal account, as things stand, they take their place as background (non-linguistic) conditions for certain locutions to be revealed as the contents of assertions or whatever. Let us see more closely.

Recall that the idea of a core theory for a language L in the bipartite set up is of a component of the theory of meaning which specifies the (indicative core) contents of sayings for utterances of L's sentences, and that in conjunction with a theory of force, reveals that sayings that p are apt (syntactically) for asserting that p. The charge of 'bogusness' then concerns any commitment to, or a failure to guard against there being distinct competencies here - viz. mastery of an expressive resource and the skill of communicating.

This charge sticks. The formal semanticist offers a theory of the semantic properties of sentences. The bipartite theory is thus charged with somehow encoding 'use' as a function of sentences, for example via an account of mood. Deploying the resources of a bipartite theory (theories of sense and force) yields redescription of sentences as, for example, formally (or syntactically) apt for assertion. The supplementary information which enables us to interpret an utterance as a fully fledged speech act is provided by knowledge of the non-linguistic psychological conditions typical of those who assert, command etc.; that is, by knowledge of the propositional attitude constraints upon ascriptions of speech acts.

But if knowledge of the bipartite theory does not suffice to yield interpretations of utterances as fully fledged token speech acts, then whatever else it achieves, it cannot be considered a plausible model of our linguistic competence, as a reflection of what is involved in linguistic understanding; not if, as I am claiming, a basic linguistic competence gives us access to acts of assertion, avowal, promising, ordering etc. This

claim exploits the idea that participation in a normal linguistic exchange gives one access to understanding another's speech, quite independently of establishing that certain complex psychological conditions obtain with the speaker. That is, it cannot be that I have to establish that they do obtain (that the situation is demonstrably 'normal') in order to be properly said to understand. Of course, it is true to say that we test our interpretations of utterances against the behaviour of speakers - that they do and say things consistent with one who asserts, commands, promises etc. But the bipartite theory does not issue in interpretations at that level, that is at the level of what speech act has been performed.

This I take to be precisely analogous to the thrust of Strawson's paper. The objection, essentially as before, is to the idea that our *linguistic* competence does not extend to cover our basic communicative (force-determining) competence, such as our ability to produce and recognise utterances as assertions, commands, questions etc. For on the bipartite model, in order to see an utterance as an assertion (rather than something merely formally fit for assertion), appeal has to be made to the conceptual connections between such speech acts and propositional attitudes. We thus end up with a picture of acts like assertion which suffers from the same problem as we encountered earlier with the Gricean picture - their production in a typical linguistic exchange will involve a wholly implausible wariness on the part of interlocutors, who are thereby required to keep checks on each other's higher order intentions. So we fail to guard against characterising mastery of the conditions for performing basic communicative acts in

terms of what is essentially extra-linguistic *as the theory of force characterises one's grasp of the fitness of locutions for such acts.*<sup>25</sup>

I am not, of course, arguing that an account of linguistic competence should aim to cover all the determinate features of actually interpreted speech actions, including all the things that might be communicated on occasions of utterance. The interpretation of many determinable features of utterance tokens - e.g. implicatures - go beyond anything that ought to be the proper concern of a theory of *linguistic* competence. But what *is* at issue here is the possibility of a typology of the basic communicative employment of expressions - an account of assertions, commands etc. - which has a central role in such a theory. (This is one good reason to look, as I do below, to a framework which makes significant distinctions *within* an account of force).

The failure of formal semantics and Gricean communication-intention theory to adequately deal with linguistic communication compels us toward a modification in how the psychological, pragmatic and semantic components of a theory of language are taken to relate. I believe that we undertake this by way of a framework which yields a notion of 'force' understood in terms of concepts which apply centrally to speakers *qua speakers*.<sup>26</sup> As anticipated, this I want to develop in connection with Austin's concept of

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<sup>25</sup> This is not to say that the concept of force, as Frege introduced it, and as Dummett has developed it, is itself extra-linguistic. Both Frege and Dummett are at pains to avoid a psychologising of the notion of assertion. For Dummett at least, force is a *conventional* notion.

<sup>26</sup> An accusation of circularity may emerge at this suggestion, along the lines of 'how are we to make sense of 'force' in terms of concepts which only have application to speakers without assuming what we really need explaining, viz. what makes vocalisations *speech*?' The proposal I will pursue, drawing on Austin, Habermas and Brandom will engender some circularity in that it is a robustly non-reductionist account of meaning, but it seeks to *explain* the applicability of such concepts in terms of concepts of discursive rationality. See also McDowell's anti-reductionism in his 1980.

*illocutionary force*.<sup>27</sup> What we need, I argue now, is access to *illocutionary* acts of assertion, commanding, asking etc.

6. If there is anything to be said in general about language use, then one of the things must be this: that there are many things that can be done with words, but not all of them can be the objects of *linguistic* inquiry, or a study of speech acts.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, there may be things that can *only* be done with words - and which are intentional acts - which should nevertheless not be considered *speech* acts (in the sense of reflecting upon a distinctly linguistic competence). Marrying seems to be such a case.<sup>29</sup>

Austin's attempts at classification of the kinds of linguistic act offer a point of departure for accounts of the different levels of analysis - and divisions of labour - within the study of linguistic behaviour. Thus, part of the rationale for his distinction between *locutionary*, *illocutionary* and *perlocutionary* acts is to offer some characterisation of the *use* of language which ought to occupy someone interested in a theory of language.

Briefly, a *locutionary* act is the production of a phonetic act with a determinate sense and reference - that is, it is the production of *interpretable words*. Any locutionary act is also, and thereby, an *illocutionary* act of doing something in the production of those interpretable words, such as asking for a drink, telling someone to leave the room, stating that the earth is flat. Additionally, by the uttering of certain words, one can be achieving

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<sup>27</sup> This echoes the move made, in differing ways, by Hornsby and Habermas.

<sup>28</sup> As Austin taught us. See also Urmson (1977), and Hornsby (1988).

<sup>29</sup> As Urmson, 1977, holds. Indeed for Urmson all of what Austin initially called performatives fail to be speech acts.

*perlocutionary* effects of persuading, misleading, alerting, frightening, cajoling. The different types of linguistic act performed by, for example, an utterance of “Beware the Jabberwock” can be represented as follows:

He said “Beware the Jabberwock” (locutionary act)

He warned us about the Jabberwock (illocutionary act)

He scared us witless (perlocutionary act).<sup>30</sup>

The idea of acts which are *essentially* linguistic, in the sense of reflecting an interest in delineating the scope of linguistic inquiry proper, is clearly something which concerned Austin, and can be seen in his attempt to gloss the illocutionary/perlocutionary distinction in terms of the ‘in saying s, x  $\psi$ -ed’ / ‘by saying s, x  $\psi$ -ed’ distinction. The former is an act taken to bear some internal or constitutive relation to a (locutionary) act of uttering s, whereas the latter is only causally related to an utterance of s (hence Austin’s talk of perlocutionary ‘effects’). We thus get the idea of the perlocutionary use of language as instrumental, as action which is only incidentally speech and which thus does not reflect upon a speaker’s competence *qua speaker* which it is thus the burden of an analysis of illocutionary acts to reflect.

A theory of what it is to be a competent language user should thus extend to cover one’s fluency with respect to acts of asserting, asking, commanding, stating, declaring, etc., though not, for example, acts of persuasion, sarcasm or marriage (i.e. even where the

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<sup>30</sup> Locutionary acts, according to Austin, are themselves composed of phonetic acts (issuing noises), phatic acts (uttering grammatical, word-like noises) and rhetic acts (uttering words). Most of ‘The Jabberwocky’ is a series of phatic acts.

latter kind can only be performed via the former kind of act); that is, it should extend to cover the ability to know, on hearing a speaker perform some locutionary thing, which illocutionary things that speaker had thereby done. So, linguistic competence would be reflected in a theory which takes us from descriptions of phonetic to descriptions of illocutionary acts thus:

(P) A uttered 's'

to

(I) A  $\psi$ -ed that p (where  $\psi$  is some illocutionary verb, and p translates s).

The suitability of the Austinian notion of an illocutionary act for my purposes is that it offers a concept of language use which is both essentially communicative and yet which reflects upon a distinctly linguistic competence. Much of this surrounds the role of what Austin called securing audience 'uptake' in their performance. Accordingly, an utterance is the successful performance of an illocutionary act of  $\psi$ -ing where an audience's taking it to be such suffices for it's being (having the illocutionary force of) a  $\psi$ -ing. That is to say, if S intends to  $\psi$  then A's taking S to be  $\psi$ -ing suffices for S to do so. An illocutionary act is thus successful just *if speech is taken as it is intended*.

Illocutionary acts are, as Austin conceived them, essentially communicative. Like Gricean intentions, they crucially involve the recognition of speakers' intentions in their fulfilment.

Distinctively, they involve the publication of *linguistic* intentions. They reflect upon a linguistic competence not just in that they are performed in the performance of

*locutionary* acts, but in that they involve a constitutive (rather than causal) relation between their communicative aims and the means of achieving them. What this establishes is a certain openness or transparency between interlocutors which clearly underwrites what I have been calling the unreflectiveness of understanding speech. Indeed the second feature of illocutionary acts which makes them suitable for my purposes is that they require solely what Hornsby calls ‘the normal working of human language’.<sup>31</sup> This clearly makes the notion of illocutionary force a good candidate for a central role in an account of linguistic competence, in contrast to the bipartite account notion of force. It is worth emphasising the difference here.

On the bipartite model, recall, the theory yields redescriptions of acts as formally fit for the performance of specific speech acts, such as assertions that *p*. The supplementary conditions that have to be met for something to be revealed as, for example, an assertion that *p*, include those non-linguistic, folk psychological conditions on the performance of such speech acts. So the interpretation of an utterance as a token speech act is established only once a host of extra-linguistic factors, as set out in the propositional attitude constraint, have been taken into account. In terms of the schema given above, knowledge of the bipartite theory does not suffice to yield redescriptions of utterances as fully fledged speech acts.

In contrast, illocutionary acts are speech acts the performance of which essentially involve audience uptake of what is being said (and done) in an utterance, *as revealed in a*

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<sup>31</sup> Hornsby, 1998, p.8.

*normal linguistic exchange*. That is, participation in such exchanges typically *suffices* for interpretation, without excursion into matters of *whether* certain extra-linguistic conditions obtain. A theory of illocutionary force - and a classification of illocutionary acts - can provide the account of the force of an utterance, of its use, in terms of concepts which have application to speakers *qua speakers*. Among other things, this enables us to better diagnose the Gricean error - which we can now characterise as making communication an essentially *perlocutionary* act, involving a causal relation between the communicative aim (to induce belief) and the means of achieving this.

These conclusions are reinforced, I think, if we consider a response to Strawson's challenge owing to McDowell, who is keen to defend the credentials of a broadly formal semantics. I argue that McDowell's defence is plausible precisely because it invokes a notion of speech acts which is Austinian, i.e. a notion of illocutionary acts.

Strawson's own response to the challenge posed for semantics by communication is to make communicative intentions of the Gricean kind basic to linguistic meaning.

McDowell<sup>32</sup> wants to agree that communication is central, but not in the way Strawson and Grice think. For them, he claims, communication primarily concerns - in the central case of asserting - the speaker's intention to get an audience to recognise his *beliefs*.

McDowell objects to the idea that communication concerns, in the first instance, the attempt to induce beliefs *about* the speaker's beliefs, rather than about what his beliefs

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<sup>32</sup> McDowell, 1980.

are about, i.e. the subject matter of discourse. Rather, he suggests that communication, getting something across, is better understood on the model of instilling knowledge, of informing others about how things are in the (linguistically disclosed) world, or of 'sharing knowledge'; just as, analogously, questioning is normally the attempt not to glean beliefs about beliefs, but to find out how things are. His task is then 'to combine the thesis that communication is the sharing of knowledge with the thesis that linguistic behaviour is essentially communicative in character'.<sup>33</sup>

Thus, as a general account of this essential character, McDowell is charged with accommodating the array of linguistic acts which seem *prima facie* ill suited to the model of 'communication as knowledge sharing', and thus with misinforming, mistakes, lies and, importantly, non-assertoric language. So, in addition to the straightforward sense in which the communicative aim of language is to share or transmit knowledge or information (about the world), McDowell appeals to a 'second level' of communication which concerns the overtness or 'transparency' of intentions in successful speech. The primary communicative intention, *pace* Grice-Strawson, is not the intention to get the hearer to form a belief about the speaker's beliefs, but is rather the distinctly linguistic *intention to say such and such* to the audience. The overtness, the mutual awareness of the speaker's intention which distinguishes successful speech, results from the speech act's 'embodying an intention whose content is precisely a recognisable performance of that very speech act'.<sup>34</sup> And in a clear sense, this remains a species of transmitting

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p.127.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p.130.

information or knowledge - only it concerns the speaker's linguistic intentions, rather than the subject of discourse.

When a properly executed speech act is understood, such information is always transmitted - not only in informative assertions but also in assertions by which information is not transmitted and in speech acts which are not assertoric at all.<sup>35</sup>

Clearly, for anyone who finds the Gricean model of communication unacceptable - particularly in making the understanding of speech implausibly complicated - this account will be salutary. This is to obscure, however, the commonalities between Strawson and McDowell (which the latter characterises as grounded in a desire to 'recall formal semantics from platonistic excess'<sup>36</sup>). Strawson claims that meaning and communication do not come apart because of the conceptual connections between the relevant notion of speech acts such as assertion, viz. as the linguistic expression of belief, and communicative intentions. McDowell's claim is analogous, but he severs the essential connection between the relevant notion of speech acts and *belief* expression. Rather, meaning does not come apart from communication because, in respect of the content of speech acts such as saying and asserting, communication is of the essence of such acts in the alternative way he outlines (in terms of knowledge sharing). So McDowell and Strawson agree that:

i) a theory of meaning is centrally concerned with speech acts such as assertion, and

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p.131.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p.139.

ii) communication is essential to a linguistic repertoire (centrally, assertoric)<sup>37</sup>

but, McDowell rejects explicating ii) in terms of (conditions of) belief expression.

My claim is that the relevant notion of speech acts is in fact the notion of *illocutionary* acts; that the relevant notion of ‘say’ in McDowell’s account of ‘second-level communication’ is clearly Austinian and cannot simply be reserved for some envisaged locutionary portion of a theory of meaning, as specifying the core contents to which a theory of force, conceived on the bipartite model, relates speakers. Recall that the notion of a speech act invoked by McDowell is of an act which embodies an intention whose content is a recognisable performance of that very act, and it is this feature which makes for the overtness of a speaker’s linguistic intentions, and thus which distinguishes successful speech:

The notion of an intentional performance is more fundamental in this context than the notion of the intention to perform it. One can sometimes divine an intention to say such and such behind a bungled performance, but correctly executed speech acts carry their intentions on their surface; normal understanding of correct speech is not a matter of divination.<sup>38</sup>

This concept of speech acts as what McDowell calls ‘publications of intentions’, as far as I can tell, coincides precisely with Austin’s concept of illocutionary acts, which are communicative in their nature in the same sense.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Specifically, for McDowell, second-level communication (as characterised above) is of the essence of a wider linguistic repertoire, where first-level communication is specifically central to an assertoric one.

<sup>38</sup> McDowell, 1980, p.130.

<sup>39</sup> McDowell acknowledges this characteristic of speech acts - recognition of the linguistic intention marks its fulfilment - in Searle’s employment of the notion of illocutionary acts in the latter’s 1969. See McDowell (1980), note 14, p.130.

7. I have argued that neither a semantics of communication-intention in the manner of Grice, nor formal semantics in a standard formulation meet the need to provide an account of communicative language use which reflects upon our *linguistic* competence. What we need, I have argued, is an Austinian notion of illocutionary speech acts, which are communicative in their nature and distinctly linguistic. They are thus part of our unreflective capacity to produce and process speech.

However, I aim to develop and deploy the concept of illocution considerably beyond that envisaged by Austin, both in terms of the philosophical approach to meaning and in relation to my concern with normativity. As mooted, this involves developing a model of communicative rationality. But there are preliminary questions arising from the discussion. Firstly, how is shifting to an Austinian notion of force a *substantial*, rather than cosmetic, alteration to how the psychological, pragmatic and semantic aspects of language relate? Does this shift leave undisturbed the distinction between force and meaning, in a way which might simply reintroduce the claim that language per se is not normative? In other words, how does the shift to an Austinian framework invite a reconciliation between the pragmatic turn and claims of the normativity of meaning?

I have argued that a substantial alteration to the topography of the theory of language is on offer in the treatment of communication within an Austinian framework of speech act theory. However I reject Austin's conventionalist account of the illocutionary. In trying to further refine the illocutionary/perlocutionary distinction, and thus the scope of linguistic inquiry proper, Austin argues that the former are distinctly *conventional* acts.

As such, certain locutions are the performance of assertion, request, command etc., in virtue of those words (with the aid of other devices) coming to be conventionally associated with the performance of those speech acts, seen as having the force of an assertion or whatever. One might conclude that this leaves the topography of the theory of language relatively unchanged, indeed along lines traced by the formal semanticist. If you can rely upon conventional relations between forms of words and uses of sentences, for example by developing an account of mood, then you've done all there is to do in encoding 'use' in your theory.

However, I think Austin mistakes the nature of the bond between interlocutors here. This results primarily from the fact that Austin himself is not really concerned with communication as such in distinguishing among speech acts. Whatever the case with Austin, I do not want to make our communicative competence a hostage to fortune by tying it to the relevant conventions obtaining. A good case can be made for thinking that such conventions do not exist, that the relation between what you communicatively do and the actual words that you use is much less rigid than this allows. This was one of the morals of the last chapter; that successful interpretation of speech, does not require some prior collusion between communicating parties.

Unlike Austin, I look to develop the notion of the illocutionary along different lines - toward a notion of communicative *rationality*. The usefulness of the notion in this regard is with how it ties in with a certain view of how practices come to be significant in a meaning-determining way. I will argue that the notion of the illocutionary act ought to

be the central component of a pragmatics which connects a certain range of *discursive* practices - primarily those involved in argumentation - with the conferral of semantic content on the performances they involve. Illocutionary speech action is the principal forum, I will argue, for the kind of communicative rationality which reveals the normativity of linguistic competence.

## 6.

1. Recall the normativity problem with which I have been concerned: preserving the essentially normative character of meaning whilst acknowledging the need for a pragmatic turn in our thinking about language. The key elements of this pragmatic turn are:

- (i) the anti-Platonism associated with Wittgenstein, specifically the commitment to the model of understanding or ‘rule following’ as involving one’s (‘implicit’) grasp in practice, rather than the accessing of explicit formulable or mentally encoded rules/interpretations;
- (ii) a specifically linguistic thesis involving the rejection of the idea of a language as an expressive resource available independently of our *communicative* practices.

How, in other words, can we retain the thought that, as language users, we are distinguished by the normativity of the competence involved (the thesis that language is constitutively normative) when that competence is geared to the practical realisation of our communicative aims?

Where have we got to in this matter? In seeking an account of meaning which acknowledges the centrality of communication yet preserves something of the autonomy of meaning from the psychological context of action (see chapter 5, #2), I have argued that we need to plot a course between the horns of Gricean intentionalism and formal semantics to make available a concept of speech acts or force which applies, as I have put

it, to speakers *qua speakers* (chapter 5, #6). A broadly Austinian notion of illocutionary acts was seen to be suitable for this purpose, in virtue of such acts being communicative in their nature and distinctly linguistic. Illocutionary speech acts, I argued, function as the publication of linguistic intentions, which has the benefit of underwriting the unreflective character of understanding speech.

Which brings us to where we are now. Having motivated the Austinian framework as an appropriate account of communicative language use, I need to make out its relevance, and that of the illocutionary act, for salvaging the normativity claim. This I want to do by arguing for an account of (discursive) practice which avails itself of the illocutionary, and which thereby contributes to a concept of communicative rationality. Importantly, this will offer a delineation of precisely those practices implicated in determining linguistic meaning. Of course, the link between rationality and meaning is not obvious. What reasons could we have for thinking that an account of rationality - in the generic sense of reason-mongering - is relevant to *meaning*, to a semantic competence? (After all wasn't it rather their possession of intentionality - 'aboutness' - which was characteristic of contentful things? See chapter 1). My first task will thus be to motivate such a link, courtesy of inferentialist strategies in semantics, before turning to the notion of a discursive pragmatics. For what inferentialism offers is a link between rationality and meaning which is exploitable at the pragmatic level.

2. Quite generally, inferentialism is the view that specifying the content of something (such as a sentence, utterance, belief) is a matter of giving its *inferential role* in a system or network of possible contents. As such, this is a matter of specifying the relevant relations of *entailment or implication* that exist between the contents of the network - that is, what other contents they follow from, and what other contents follow from them. Thus to be ascribed some content is to be ascribed a certain ability - mastery, if you like, of the relevant inferences or content transitions.<sup>1</sup> And, quite generally, something is contentful in so far as it is caught up in a network or system of such transitions. For example, take specifying the content of the logical constants, say '&'. An inferentialist account would give the meaning of '&' in terms of (its contribution to) inferences involving it. So, anyone describable as committed to  $p$  and committed to  $q$ , counts as committed to  $p \& q$ , and anyone describable as committed to  $p \& q$  is thereby committed to  $p$  and committed to  $q$ .

The example is actually trivially elucidative since logical constants just are devices for moving from expressions to expressions in a truth preserving manner, i.e. in a manner which determines legitimate inferences. In other words, you can't really give a non-inferentialist account of logical constants. So, more relevantly can inferentialism stand as a model for content or meaning *more generally*? The natural objection is that meaning as we understand it is more a question of what expressions *are about*; that is, that the meaning relevant relations concern their relations, not so much to other

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<sup>1</sup> What distinguishes inferentialism from functionalism is precisely the distinction between inferences and state transitions - the former requires sensitivity to relations of inferential *consequence*.

expressions, but to the extra-symbolic things they *represent*. This invites the following dialectic - representationalism versus inferentialism. The representationalist might begin with primitive relations of reference, such as denotation, naming or satisfaction, and seek to build up more complex semantic constructions in those terms. Whatever the details, once a notion of *truth* - a notion typically of word-world correspondence - is in place you can ultimately explain inferences. The one putatively explains the other. An inferentialist strategy, by contrast, inverts this order of explanation, by giving an account of the content of sentences or propositions in terms of their inferential role, and then explaining the semantic properties of the sub-sentential in terms of those of the sentential.

The representationalist's identification of something's having meaning with its representing something in the non-linguistic/non-mental world is clearly suspect as it stands, not so much because some classes of expressions do not refer (e.g. logical constants/connectives), which is true, but because *any* meaningful expression can fail to refer, can fail to pick out some object or class or state of affairs (recall the King of France and his celebrated baldness). Thus, the representationalist cannot take representation as primitive, so much as representational *purport*, the attempt to refer. Witness the seminal distinction between sense and reference introduced by Frege. Non-referring expressions can still have a meaning, they need not be 'senseless' (e.g. 'The King of France'). Similarly, co-referring expressions can *differ* in meaning (e.g. 'morning star'/'evening star'). The inferentialist can be seen as motivated in part by the opportunities opened up by this distinction - such as a shift from notions of the priority of truth as successful

representation, to the priority of putting forward as true (truth-taking or assertion); from the priority of one's expression referring, to one's *grasp of sense*. What makes this a motivation for inferentialism is the pragmatic shift it invites, toward what is done with expressions, and the commensurate shift to the semantic priority of the sentential/propositional once the identification between meaning and reference is surrendered. An expression's meaning something (having what he later called a sense) is a matter of what in the *Begriffsschrift* Frege termed its contribution to 'the content of a possible judgement'. This credits a semantic priority to the linguistic/expressive unit of judgement - viz. the sentence or proposition, precisely the kind of thing which figures as the premises and conclusions of inferences.

However, my aim is not primarily to motivate inferentialism over representationalism, but to mark the general merits of the former, in the light of what has gone before.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, if the primary aim in that dialectic is to demonstrate how the semantic 'primitives' of the one are explicable in terms of the other, then one will not find a demonstration here. I am more concerned to indicate how well inferentialism complements both the elements of the pragmatic turn and the normativity claim.

The pragmatic emphasis in inferentialism exploits the thought that inferences, as semantic primitives according to the inferentialist strategy, can be given a natural pragmatic rendering; not just in that inferences are things that one *does*, or performs, but because they can be *implicit* in certain practices, rather than explicit in the form of rules.

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<sup>2</sup> I do look at an instance of this dialectic in the next chapter in contrasting Searle and Habermas on the illocutionary.

Indeed, we implicitly endorse inferences all the time. If, in response to my friend's claim that the stew lacks something, I add some salt to it, I am implicitly endorsing the inference from the addition of salt to the improvement of the flavour of the stew. If you ask me why I added salt to the stew, you are implicitly querying that inference. If, on encountering some Italian-Americans in the street I say something like 'Here comes the Mob', I am implicitly endorsing an inference from their particular ethnicity to the typical character of their business links - that is I am committing myself to the goodness of that inference.

Secondly, inferentialism, in characterising linguistic competence as a form of mastery of inference, offers us an appropriate model of such competence precisely because inferences have *normative* force. This goes back to the discussion of the normativity of 'having reasons' in chapter 1 - inferences are the explicit form, the exoskeleton, of having reasons; they reveal the structure of reasoning - of what is a reason for what; a structure which is normative. Putting things another way, a system described as inferential is held together by relations of heritability governing the *commitments* and *entitlements* engendered by its components (e.g. deductive relations *preserving* commitment across claims/ inductive relations *permitting* commitment across claims). These are specifically normative, deontic notions, and they are essential to a systems being distinctly inferential (rather than merely functional).

These merits notwithstanding, can inferentialism extend to capture relations constitutive of *content*, that is concerning what expressions are about in addition to how they (internally) relate? As I suggested in chapter 4 (#11), this question surrounds the viability of a notion of *material inference*, understood as those inferences a competence with which essentially involves the contents of the non-logical vocabulary concerned. The debate surrounded whether an appropriate notion of material *goodness* of inference could be developed to do service in an account of meaning. Bilgrami argued, recall, that a notion of material inference did not supply a notion of norms of *meaning*, precisely because they do not legislate for particular inferential liaisons. I argued then that in fact it was precisely the normativity of inference - the requirement that the inferences endorsed be 'harmonious' - that made them relevant to the determination of (non-logical) meaning. However, this merely gives us a clue as to how an inferentialism about meaning might get off the ground. It would be useful to look in more detail at how an inferentialism might cohere with a normative-pragmatic approach to language. A thorough working out of this key idea is given by Brandom (1994). I discuss below Brandom's contribution to articulating this idea. The relevance of Brandom's work to my concerns should become apparent - his aim being to outline those irreducibly normative practices which confer distinctively linguistic meaning upon the performances caught up in them. However, my preferred understanding of a specifically *discursive* pragmatic theory, although inspired by it, differs from his, specifically in regard to how it relates to the notion of communicative language use.

3. In Chapter 1 of *Making it Explicit* Brandom is concerned to motivate what is in essence the Wittgensteinian pragmatist order of explanation outlined above (see chapter 3). Specifically, the aim is to develop an account of the priority of norms as implicit in practice as a foundation for the analysis of the manner in which a certain kind of practical-inferential competence confers specifically conceptual and linguistic content upon the states and performances involved (which occupies the bulk of his project). The hope is to provide an account of the distinctively normative nature of such competence without falling foul of the either intellectualism ('regulism' or the priority of norms *qua* explicit rules) nor mere 'regularism' about norms (that norms codify or reduce to mere regularities): these being the twin horns of the dilemma Wittgenstein addresses in the rule-following considerations.

Marshalling the theme of normativity from Kant, Frege and Wittgenstein, Brandom arrives at a view of the mastery of conceptual competencies (rule-following, understanding) as government by norms, the fundamental form of which is implicit in practical abilities of various kinds. The themes of a) normativity (specifically, that such things as belief and meaning are what he calls normative 'statuses'<sup>3</sup>), and b) the pragmatic turn inaugurated by Wittgenstein's critique of intellectualism and the shift to practices, are combined with c), the Kantian idea that what is characteristic of being

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<sup>3</sup> Nothing technical is meant by talk of statuses here. It is really the idea of a type of state (of a network), but characterised so as to be amenable to the kind of social game-theoretic interpretation he subsequently develops.

subject to norms is our acting according to our *conception* or acknowledgement of those norms. This concerns the way in which rules govern the behaviour of rational beings as opposed to mere objects in nature (Kant does not use the term 'norm' to mark this distinction). The notion of acting according to a *conception* of a rule introduces the distinctive way that such government is mediated by our being *taken* to be so governed, i.e. by being subject to a certain kind of self and other assessment. The thought thus motivates the core idea of normative statuses being instituted by normative attitudes.<sup>4</sup> So, Brandom moves from the normative statuses which are characteristic of conceptual attributions to their (implicit) acknowledgement in practical normative attitudes of being taken or treated (assessed) to be correct, entitled, committed etc.

Brandom suggests that the basic normative attitudes of taking or treating something as correct, appropriate etc., are most obviously implicit in practices of reward and punishment, that is, *sanctions*. A parent or teacher manifests their (dis)approval of the child's behaviour or performance by a system of rewards and punishments (most basically, praise or blame, tick or cross). It is in virtue of such a system that learning is possible, including the general case of learning to be a community member, where learning to do something is a matter of being able to grasp what is correct or appropriate behaviour. Having motivated the move to normative attitudes/assessments as instituting normative statuses, the question then concerns how we understand those attitudes and the

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<sup>4</sup> Indeed, Brandom notes a particular strain of Enlightenment thought running through Kant, and originating in Hobbes and Pufendorf, which acknowledges a supervenience of normative or evaluative status on normative attitude. Kant resists, *pace* Hobbes, a non-cognitivist reduction of these attitudes, a resistance which Brandom endorses.

practices in which they are implicit. Do we analyse them using normative or non-normative vocabulary? Can they (must they?) be understood in terms of a reductive, non-normative metalanguage? Brandom's response is to argue for a robustly non-reductive account of those practical attitudes (4 below). His analysis of norms thus involves the endorsement of the following four moves:

1. The Kantian idea of acting in accordance with a conception of a rule, which motivates the shift from normative status to normative attitude.
2. The pragmatic construal of these attitudes - i.e. their being implicit in practices of taking or treating performances as correct or incorrect.
3. These practices being understood as practices of reward and punishment, i.e. sanctions.

and

4. A conception of the system of sanctions as 'internal' i.e. internal to a network of normative statuses. So sanctions are understood in terms of alterations in other normative statuses (other entitlements/obligations) rather than in terms of patterns of behaviour identified non-normatively. Accordingly, the behaviours which realise the practical attitudes of sanctioning are modelled on, for example, the teacher restricting the child's *other entitlements*, e.g. to play time, rather than preventing the child leaving the classroom (physical coercion).

One might, after all, be tempted to suggest a simple non-normative account of sanctions, understanding them in terms of patterns of positive and negative reinforcement. On such

a reductive account, to treat a performance as correct/incorrect would amount to regularly rewarding/punishing that kind of behaviour. So the status of correct/incorrect behaviour would thus amount to its being identifiable as the kind of behaviour that, as a matter of fact, elicits reward/punishment. This way of putting things makes the reductive nature of this account clear - to explain normative statuses in terms of matter of fact regularities of sanction (practical assessment).

Brandom's response to this is to reapply Wittgenstein's argument against this 'regularism' - that there is no way of privileging one regularity over the myriad other possible regularities without assuming the very normative notion of correctness that stands to be explained. Thus, there remains the crucial question of whether the reinforcing behaviour, say the beating with sticks to use Brandom's stock example, is actually itself appropriate, that is whether the sanction is *deserved*. If an action's deserving punishment amounts merely to its susceptibility to punishment, any action will, in principle, be deserving of punishment, since any action is punishable.

Is there another way of understanding norms in terms of matter-of-fact regularities in practical assessment, but which can underwrite, rather than assume, the distinction between a correct and incorrect assessment? This is precisely the question that commentators such as Kripke and Wright see Wittgenstein answering affirmatively at #202 of the *Philosophical Investigations*, where they have him proposing a *community* assessment account of norms and normativity. Such an account would seek to preserve a regularity theory of norm-instituting practices by appeal to the assessments, the practical

attitudes, of the community as a whole. So, behaviour is (appropriately treated as) correct in so far as it is rewarded/punished or otherwise positively or negatively assessed *by the community*. This allows for the crucial distinction between regularly sanctioning and appropriately sanctioning - since only certain regularities *matter* (those which express the community verdict). The question is whether such an account offers a non-normative account of the institution of normative statuses (or, in Brandom's terminology, the explanation of *proprieties* of assessment in terms of the *properties* of the assessing).

I have suggested before, in chapter 3, that the so-called 'community view' tries and fails to offer such a reductive account; failing in illicitly assuming precisely the kind of subjection to authority that stands in need of explanation. In effect, being a community member in the requisite sense is itself a normative status (viz. being *answerable* to the community), and this fails to be explained in terms merely of *conformity* to what the community deems appropriate. (See chapter 3, #7). Brandom takes up a similar line of attack. The central idea is that anything beyond a merely aggregative notion of community<sup>5</sup> (e.g. determined by a head count), will fail to be an explanation of how a community is circumscribed or identified *in non-normative terms*. In other words, the notions of community verdict, where it makes sense, and of community membership, trade on the distinctions between assessing and being entitled to assess and between being assessed and being properly or appropriately assessed – distinctions which clearly appeal

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<sup>5</sup> Recall, the community view is introduced to underwrite a normative notion of community. A merely aggregative notion of community is, as the authors of community views (e.g. Wright, 1980) agree, no real notion of community at all, since it fails to discriminate real from apparent rule-following (or as I have put it here, answerability from conformity).

to prior normative statuses. Thus, the community assessment reading of norm-instituting attitudes actually assumes certain normative statuses, and so cannot be a (reductive) picture of ‘bedrock’.<sup>6</sup>

#### 4. Brandom’s model of discursive practice: an outline

Putting these meta-level concerns to one side, we can approach the detail of Brandom’s model of the practices which institute specifically *linguistic* norms, i.e. his account of how conceptual content gets conferred on speech acts. I propose to give here the merest outline of the account, primarily in order to introduce the idea of a normative pragmatics, before turning to criticism in #5.

Having motivated the pragmatic order of explanation, involving essentially the claim that the talk of normative statuses that characterises intentional and semantic attributions is to be replaced by talk of the ‘proprieties’ that govern the practical attitudes which institute them, Brandom develops his account of the specifically *discursive* practices which are ultimately responsible for conferring distinctively linguistic (paradigmatically propositional) content on speech acts. The central claim that Brandom makes here is that what characterises an utterance being *propositionally contentful* is its function in reasoning, specifically its ability to act as, or stand in need of, *reasons*. The

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<sup>6</sup> As Brandom notes, this need not preclude a further reductive account of normative attitudes, one which might yet account for the statuses of community membership and authority. All that is argued for here is that a community assessment view such as is offered by Kripke and Wright’s Wittgenstein does not provide it. Furthermore, an adequate response in normative terms has to be forthcoming if we are not to conclude that the pragmatic construal of norms (‘implicit in practice’) offers no better understanding of linguistic or conceptual ‘bedrock’.

theoretical possibility opened up by an association of contentfulness with an utterance's inferential role is central to Brandom's project - particularly, the idea that the proprieties of practice governing the giving and asking for reasons might determine in a systematic way the *inferential* properties or roles of utterances mapped by their semantic content.

What Brandom proposes is to link pragmatic significance to semantic content via the notion of inference, thereby preserving the pragmatic order of explanation in claiming that propositional content is conferred upon expressions which are caught up in certain kinds of discursive practice, namely those concerning the giving and asking for reasons. The articulation of the normative *proprieties* of inference - the structure of entitlements and commitments involved in them - will, so the account goes, fix the semantic properties, conceived as given by their inferential roles.

Translating back into talk of statuses and attitudes, the normative statuses associated with the attribution of conceptual, paradigmatically propositional, contents are to be articulated in terms of their inferential roles, which are in turn to be understood, according to the pragmatic theory, in terms of the associated commitments and entitlements which fix those roles. So, the normative statuses concerned (those which institute inferentially articulated contents) are specifically *deontic* statuses.<sup>7</sup> On the inferential model, the content of some utterance is given by specifying what it follows from and what follows from it. This is understood in terms of the structure of entitlements

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<sup>7</sup> The appeal to the specifically deontic model is due to the way in which proprieties governing basic inferences can be understood in terms of the corresponding commitment/entitlement structures. Appropriate or good inferences can be understood in terms of the preservation of commitments and/or entitlements. So, for example, an expression that is understood in terms of its role in a pattern of inductive reasoning will have an entitlement-preserving pragmatic structure.

and commitments involved in making the utterance (characteristic of the kind of speech act concerned). In line with the pragmatic order of explanation, viz. the pragmatic rendering of normative statuses, these structures are to be understood in terms of the practices governing the normative (specifically, *deontic*) attitudes of taking or treating someone to be committed or entitled; that is, the practices of attributing and undertaking commitments and entitlements.

The practices concerned are given a social game-theoretic character by Brandom.

I quote him at length:

Here, then, is a way of thinking about implicitly normative social practices. Social practices are games in which each participant exhibits various deontic statuses - that is, commitments and entitlements - and each practically significant performance alters those statuses in some way. The significance of the performance is how it alters the deontic statuses of the practitioners. Looking at the practices a little more closely involves cashing out the talk of deontic *statuses* by translating it into talk of deontic *attitudes*. Practitioners take or treat themselves and others as having various commitments and entitlements. They *keep score* on deontic statuses by attributing those statuses to others and undertaking them themselves. The significance of a performance is the difference it makes in the deontic score ...<sup>8</sup>

Something thus having the significance of, for example, an assertion that p will be a matter of its having a particular deontic score, typically characteristic of assertions, conceived formally as a function from the score prior to its utterance to the score consequent upon its utterance, where scores are understood as 'constellations of commitments and entitlements on the part of various interlocutors'.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Brandom, 1994, p.166.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p.183. Brandom's use of the game-theoretic notion of scorekeeping is derived from David Lewis's account of conversational scorekeeping. See Lewis, 1983.

It would be worth looking at a couple of informal examples of the commitment/entitlement structure through which Brandom seeks to explain the significance of speech acts. Take the example of promising,<sup>10</sup> which gives a nice example of the social-practical aspect of deontic attitudes. The deontic structure of promising can be seen as the product of two co-ordinate dimensions of authority and responsibility - the authority to license and assume entitlements (in promising something, I entitle you to sanction non-performance) and the responsibility to undertake commitments (I undertake the commitment to perform what I have promised and the commitment to license entitlement to others, for example, to sanction non-performance). We can thus see the speech act as a particular nexus of deontic attitudes of attributing and undertaking deontic statuses. Similarly, an utterance's having the significance of an assertion will involve the undertaking of a commitment - making a 'claim' - (and the licensing of attributions of that commitment), the licensing or authorising of further undertakings of such commitments (commensurate with what the claim entails) and the undertaking of a ('task') responsibility or warrant to demonstrate entitlement to the commitment if appropriately challenged. Of course, the articulation of the commitments involved in assertions will vary in accordance with the different kinds of inference involved, and in particular the different relations of (commitment preserving or entitlement establishing) heritability that characterise those inference-types.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> See Brandom, *op cit*, pp.163-5.

<sup>11</sup> Roughly, deductive and inductive inference respectively.

5. An important feature of Brandom's project, which is central to his use of the notion of inference (and which *prima facie* sets him apart from the pragmatic tradition we will see running from the later Wittgenstein and Austin to Habermas) concerns the role of assertions in his account of discursive practice. I will argue that one aspect of this - a certain pragmatic priority credited to the notion of assertion - in fact takes him quite close to an endorsement of the Austinian framework that was recommended in the last chapter. However, I argue that the fruitful connection here between a discursive pragmatics and a specifically illocutionary notion of speech acts is missed by Brandom, and that this leaves him with a notion of force which is uncomfortably close to an effective recapitulation of the problematic formal semantic picture we encountered in the previous chapter. I end with a clarification of the challenges confronting any alternative.

According to Brandom, assertions are 'in the fundamental case what reasons are asked for, and what giving a reason always consists in'; they are thus 'fundamentally fodder for inferences'; their priority traced to their basic role in 'reason-mongering practice'.<sup>12</sup> He suggests that other commitments beside assertional ones 'involve liability to demands for justification or other demonstration of entitlement' and that 'other things besides assertional commitments can entitle interlocutors to assertional commitments' but that 'only assertional commitments stand in both these relations'.<sup>13</sup> Indeed he goes on to claim that other 'vocal' acts are only distinctively *speech* acts in virtue of being parasitic upon

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<sup>12</sup> Brandom, op cit, pp.167 and 168.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p.167.

assertions, concluding that ‘Asserting is the fundamental speech act, defining the specific difference between linguistic and social practices more generally’.<sup>14</sup> Assertions are the fundamental kind of *speech* act because they alone exhibit the core commitment/entitlement structure by means of which he aims to explain the conferral of specifically *propositional* contents - that is via their inferential articulation, their dual role as (the contents of) the premises and conclusions of inferences. So, this *pragmatic* priority of assertion connects with a *semantic* priority of the propositional; specifically, in virtue of the way that making claims is embedded in the (inferential) processes of giving and asking for *reasons* which implement propositional contents. The notion of inference, which according to the inferentialist strategy is semantically primitive, is uniquely complemented at the (normative) pragmatic level by the notion of *assertional* commitments.

Now, I find Brandom’s thought here compelling. That is, I agree with the idea of a certain pragmatic priority to the notion of assertional commitments, to the idea of the priority of commitments made so as to be able to bring reasons to bear, for and against them. This idea of the priority of *claims*, it seems to me, has to be a fundamental commitment of a pragmatics which appeals specifically to a notion of *discursive* practice, quite independently (as we shall see) of commitment to an explicitly inferentialist semantic theory. I will argue in the next chapter that it is the connection with processes of *argumentation* - with making, challenging and redeeming claims - that makes the

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p.173.

practices relevant to my concerns with the normativity of meaning. Indeed, this (Socratic) thought is a guiding one, being central to my understanding of normativity and the relation between thought and talk. My concern, at this stage, is with the notion of speech acts that this priority of assertion licenses - and in particular, with the need to recognise the move from the notion of assertional commitment to a concept of specifically *illocutionary* acts. My contention is that Brandom's commitment to a traditional formal semantic idiom prevents him from acknowledging the connection here, and thereby getting beyond the residual extrusion of a notion of 'force' from the theory of meaning proper.

The idea of illocutionary acts is the idea of a proper subset of vocal acts, and which are intimately linked to the exercise of a distinctly linguistic competence. They are, that is, distinctly and paradigmatically, *speech* acts. When Brandom offers a general characterisation of speech acts, the idea of an *illocutionary* class is not openly in view. However, we are offered a characterisation of the relation between assertion and other vocal acts that makes for an interesting - and linguistic competence-reflecting - notion of speech action in general and which comes importantly close, I think, to a notion of the illocutionary.

We can glean that something like the following holds for Brandom - that speech acts involve performances at least some of which must have the significance of assertions: 'It is only because some performances function as assertions that others

deserve to be distinguished as speech acts'.<sup>15</sup> Brandom has disappointingly little to say about non-assertoric speech acts. At times he seems to rely on particular asymmetrical relations of intelligibility - so the class of questions, for instance, 'is recognizable in virtue of its relation to possible answers, and offering an answer is making an assertion'.<sup>16</sup> But what is the character of the general 'parasitic' relation? After all, merely being caught up in practices which include assertions will be too weak a notion to make out an interesting class of speech acts (e.g. convincing someone involves making assertions, but it is questionably a speech act per se). I think the following remarks indicate that it is an *explicitating* (or explicit-making) character of the commitments engendered by speech acts which can be crucial to their character *qua speech* acts, and in terms of which they depend upon assertions.

'Orders or commands are ... performances that alter the boundaries of what is permissible or obligatory ...*specifically by saying or describing what is and is not appropriate* and this sort of making explicit is parasitic on claiming... In the same way, promises are not just undertakings of responsibility to perform in a certain way. They are performances that undertake such responsibility *by saying or describing explicitly what one undertakes to do*.'<sup>17</sup>

Elaborating, Brandom gives the example of an order to 'Shut the door', which he claims 'counts as an order only in the context of a practice that includes judgements, and therefore assertions, that the door is shut or that it is not shut'.<sup>18</sup> Now, the notion of speech acts I want to reconstruct from this would be along the lines of linguistic or vocal acts which succeed by specifying their conditions of satisfaction (or some suitable

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p.172.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p.172.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p.172. (My italics).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p.172.

generalisation of that concept, to include conditions of fulfilment for non-assertoric speech acts). So, generalising, such acts achieve their primary objectives - e.g. obligating others or oneself - by explicitly specifying the conditions of their satisfaction, and in a way which depends upon assertions. That is, the 'sayings' or 'describings' referred to by Brandom constitute stated or presupposed claims (which are assertoric). So, 'Don't eat with your mouth open' constitutes an order - a change in some sphere of legitimate behaviour - in virtue, among other things, of being a specification of what is and what is not (now) appropriate, a specification which involves claims, or judgements, e.g. that your mouth is open (and you are eating) or that your mouth is closed (and you are eating). So an order works by making explicit what is (and what is not) appropriate behaviour. Likewise, a promise works by, among other things, being an explicit specification of what the commitment undertaken is.

Now the question I am concerned with is what notion of speech acts we can tease out of this, and it is clear that what I am calling this explicating characteristic has something in common with the notion of the illocutionary act. Recall Austin's attempted schema - illocutionary acts are what is done (ordering, promising, etc.) 'in saying' such and such. Brandom's notion appears to recapitulate the idea of the performative utterance - a doing of something by way of actually saying something. Moreover, the explicating characteristic seems to delimit the notion further - to performative utterances which actually depend upon a certain kind of saying; one which constitutes, as I have put it, a

specification of what would fulfil or achieve the utterance's 'primary objective'; a kind of saying which is parasitic on assertions *that* such and such is or is not the case.

This notion of speech acts would appear to share characteristics with illocutionary acts. The fact that the former involve the publication of their satisfaction conditions relates to the transparency, or openness, of illocutionary speech acts (in virtue of being the publication of linguistic intentions) which was seen to be significant in the last chapter. One way I suggested we understand the notion of the illocutionary - and Austin's thought about the 'in saying/by saying' contrast by which he sought to delineate the class of speech acts - is in terms of a *constitutive* relation between the communicative aims of an utterance and the means of achieving them. Certainly the aims of Brandom's explicating speech acts bear a similar relation to the means of achieving them - so, in the case of promising, aiming to undertake a commitment by actually articulating that commitment.

Furthermore it would appear that the notion of speech acts in play in Brandom will carve up speech action similarly to an Austinian framework. So, vocal acts which primarily aim to, for example, mislead, persuade, terrify etc. do not require that one say what would constitute a fulfilment of those aims. These, moreover, are paradigmatically *perlocutionary* acts according to the Austinian. They involve a merely causal relation between aims and means.

What Brandom appears to have then is a notion of explicit speech action which appears coextensive with the illocutionary class. But what was definitive of the

*illocutionary* class was what Austin called uptake - and what I glossed in terms of the constitutive role of *recognition* of an utterance's aims in securing them. Such recognition, recall, sufficed for the fulfilment of those aims. The mechanism of success for Brandom's speech acts, according to the reconstruction I have offered, would be that they make explicit their conditions of satisfaction. Clearly, an explicit speech act in Brandom's sense does not suffice for the performance of an illocutionary act. To undertake a promise it is not enough that you say what you undertake to do - your performance has to be *taken* to be a promising. To actually change 'the boundaries of what is permissible or obligatory', it's not enough that you describe the changes - your performance has to be taken as the issuing of an instruction that those changes be brought about. These speech acts do more than express what proposition is to be 'made true', so to speak. Indeed, with respect to both directive and commissive speech acts (those which commit the hearer or speaker respectively to some course of action), a crucial element concerns the normative context in which they operate, concerning the legitimacy of the interpersonal relations that are on offer - e.g. whether an order is appropriate (for example, whether a speaker can legitimately expect to exert their will) or a promise legitimate (for example, that the speaker is held to obligate themselves). So, a certain claim to authority is what makes something an order rather than a request. A certain claim to legitimacy is what makes a promise more than just a prediction, or expression of intent. What these acts share then is more than just a relation to 'claims' which describe their satisfaction conditions - but also

to claims which concern other, for example normative, conditions upon their being the speech acts they are.

One of the things I believe one misses by not developing speech acts in terms of specifically illocutionary acts concerns the potential for establishing how *different* claims or assertional commitments contribute to a plausible typology of generic speech acts - in particular, how recognition of the different claims raised by speech acts contributes to the determination of an utterance's force. As this is the focus of the next chapter, I will content myself with the following remarks.

My complaint is not simply that Brandom fails to be sensitive to the different conditions that have to be met in order for speech acts to be successful - and which are many according to standard analyses, such as that given by Searle.<sup>19</sup> This would not be a reasonable criticism per se, since Brandom is expressly concerned only with the pragmatic determination of *meaning*, with how a semantic theory might be supported by a pragmatic theory. Rather, it is that his antecedent (or default) commitment to the formal semantic division of labour in the theory of language prevents the acknowledgement of the different ways in which 'claims' (assertional commitments) are raised (and evaluated) by communicative speech acts, and how this contributes to the determination of utterance force. Moreover, this *does* impact on what notion of pragmatic 'success' might be deemed meaning-relevant, given that what makes for meaningfulness is ultimately

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<sup>19</sup> See Searle (1969).

some performance's being caught up in discursive practices of a certain sort. These thoughts, as noted, are taken up in the next chapter.<sup>20</sup>

6. How exactly is Brandom's commitment to the formal semantic picture manifested?

Surely he has a more sophisticated understanding of the relation between semantics and pragmatics than those in Strawson's sights?

The motivation given in the last chapter for moving to a specifically illocutionary notion of speech acts concerned the distinctions it makes available within an account of language use, and in particular in regard to the notion of force. The formal semantic picture I characterised in terms of a strong distinction between pragmatic significance (or 'force') and propositional content (meaning). A major problem I located for this view concerned commitments on the division of labour in the theory of language and the impact of these upon the plausibility of subsequent models of linguistic competence. This I contrasted with a framework which made important distinctions within the account of force, and which delivered a notion of force which I claimed applied to speakers *qua* speakers, and which thereby placed a speaker's competence with respect to a repertoire of basic communicative acts within the bounds of an account of distinctively linguistic competence, which the theory of meaning is charged with reflecting.

The inferentialist strategy Brandom endorses really involves commitment to a certain priority in the order of explanation in the theory of meaning, rather than any

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<sup>20</sup> I also return in chapter 7, #7, to a similar line of criticism in discussing Searle's attempt to construct a typology of speech acts in terms of the notion of conditions of satisfaction.

change in the essential character of that theory. So Brandom's project is to explain traditional semantic vocabulary (by which he means the determination of truth-conditions, reference and predication) in terms of a primitive notion of goodness of material inference (and via inferentially interpretable notions of substitution and anaphora) - that is explaining representational semantic vocabulary in terms of inferentialist semantic vocabulary.

Brandom's normative pragmatics contributes to the 'global' question of how, in general, states and performances get content 'conferred' on them. This constitutes the pragmatic order of explanation that he endorses - it provides for a general notion of contentfulness. However, the 'local' issues of determining the pragmatic significance of particular states and performances by their semantic content work the other way. Importantly, once a notion of propositional contentfulness has been made available, the theory of meaning works much as the formal semanticist envisages. As Brandom puts it:

Once a general notion of content has been made sense of in this [pragmatic] way, particular attributions of contentfulness can then be offered as part of explanations or explicit specifications of the pragmatic significance of a state, attitude, performance, or expression.<sup>21</sup>

Semantics is thus answerable to pragmatics primarily at the *global* level. What this is a guard against, in the most general of terms, is an unconstrained notion of pragmatic significance doing service for a notion of meaning. (The example often given of such a notion is certain interpretations of the later Wittgenstein, which have him instituting

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<sup>21</sup> Brandom, op cit, p.133.

something called language-game pragmatics). The very idea of a semantics is, after all, of an analysis of linguistic meaning abstracted from particular contexts of use. And there's the rub. For if the 'local' determination of meaning can proceed in this way, then the pragmatic account becomes entirely auxiliary (as the formal semanticist sees it).

One might ask how Brandom conceives the relation between 'force' and 'content', since as I have suggested it is part of (at least one strain of) the pragmatic turn to reject the idea of a (strongly) autonomous or force-invariant level of semantic content. Following Brandom, we can appeal to Dummett's idea of a *key concept* in the theory of meaning to clarify the relation. This notion involves commitment to the promise of a theoretical notion of content, characterised in terms of the key concept (such as truth) from which, as Dummett puts it, 'corresponding to each different kind of force will be a different uniform pattern of derivation of the use of a sentence from its sense'.<sup>22</sup> It is Brandom's aim to combine the pragmatic turn with the idea of a key concept, that concept being, on his account, *inference*. The aim, as pointed out, is not to replace semantic content with a notion of pragmatic significance but to see how a general theory of the pragmatic significance of various acts can be seen to fit with the inferential articulation of the propositional contents they express. But I have suggested that the relation between the pragmatic significance of utterances, like orders and promises, and the contents of the assertional commitments they involve cannot be regarded simply in terms of making explicit (or expressing) conditions of satisfaction (that is, effectively

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<sup>22</sup> Dummett, 1973, p.361

asserting what, in these cases, is the proposition made true). The question then is whether this broader role for 'claiming' - the central notion of a discursive pragmatics - can be generalised for language use as a whole.

In conclusion, my main concern with Brandom's account is that the failure to acknowledge the centrality of a specifically illocutionary notion of speech acts undermines the attempt to show how the central (or key) concept of the theory of meaning (for him, inference) impacts upon a general notion of (communicative) language use, and that the normative pragmatics thereby ends up as somewhat *auxiliary* to the theory of meaning (which remains explicable in terms of a relatively autonomous notion of propositional content). My concern is thus that this account effectively constitutes a recapitulation of the formal semantic picture - that one can do the whole account of linguistic meaningfulness without attending to the communicative significance of utterances. We do not get a sense of how the discursive practices taken to institute *linguistic* competence extend beyond or from the assertoric to determine a basic communicative repertoire, that there is any plausible proposal about how to specify the ('parasitic') relation between assertion and the rest of language use.<sup>23</sup> This delimitation, as was the case with *truth*, begins to seem like the price of inferentialism.

Brandom's central claim here, recall, rested on the thought that the practical attitudes that institute linguistic and conceptual content - concerning the proprieties

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<sup>23</sup> Certainly, there is no hint in the schematic treatment Brandom gives of speech acts like promising. See Brandom, *op cit*, pp 163-5.

governing giving and asking for reasons - were to be understood in terms of the primarily assertional commitments of interlocutors. The reason for this appealed to the fact that assertions appear uniquely related to discursive reason-mongering (for example, in the light of an assertion's being what giving a reason always consists in). Any rejection or modification of this approach is thus in danger of failing to delineate practices which institute specifically *linguistic* competencies.

But my aim now is not to reject Brandom's approach. Rather, I want to explore the possibilities that are opened up by a relaxing of inferentialism<sup>24</sup> to expressly accommodate the diversity of basic communicative acts in a normative pragmatics - that is, by availing itself of the concept of distinctly illocutionary speech acts - without jeopardising either the normativity that is central to 'having reasons', and thereby the pragmatic priority of assertional commitments, or the specifically linguistic character of the competencies involved. This is the principal challenge faced in the next chapter. Another challenge is to relate any alternative to a notion of a key concept; to the retention of something of the theoretical tractability purchased by distinguishing force from meaning/content, central as that is to the idea of a *theory* of meaning.

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<sup>24</sup> Actually, as will soon become clear, this relaxation takes on the form of generalising from the notion of inference to a broader notion of validity as a central concept of an account of meaning and speech acts.

## 7.

In chapter 5, I made a number of claims regarding the utility of Austin's notion of illocutionary acts - that it clarifies the communicative nature of speech acts which Strawson (and Grice) identify as at the heart of ('non-naturally') meaningful expression, but crucially in such a way as to offer a specifically *linguistic* conception of this nature (and which thereby accords with an appropriate epistemology of language). The Austinian framework makes available a notion of the force of speech acts which applies to speakers *qua* speakers. In the previous chapter (6), I drew attention to the general merits of an inferentialism about meaning - particularly, its coherence with a normative model of the (discursive) practices which confer content on the states, expressions and performances caught up in them.

What I am aiming to establish in the present chapter is that there is a notion of discursive practice which avails itself of the notion of illocutionary speech acts, and which thereby;

- (i) offers a notion of communicative rationality which speaks directly to our overall concern with the normativity of language;
- (ii) is the centrepiece of a pragmatics which relates appropriately to a philosophical concern with meaning.

So, my concern is to find a pragmatics (an account of the practical significance of linguistic acts) with two elements. The 'discursive' element is aimed at domesticating the

Socratic thought (see chapter 1) by which I mean to deal with normativity - the idea of content forged in making explicit assertional commitments in the critical-evaluative practice of argumentation; that is, in practices of giving and asking for reasons. This takes over much of the reasoning offered by Brandom which I discussed in the last chapter, but is developed below in terms of a notion of communicative rationality.

The second, illocutionary element subserves what I have argued is a meaning-theoretical rationale to develop a notion of language use which clarifies the communicative character of basic linguistic competence in a way which does not implausibly bifurcate that competence into expressive and communicative elements. In the present chapter I make a case for thinking that it is, in fact, precisely illocutionary acts that are the vehicle for the kind of discursive rationality I wish to harness in making good the thesis of linguistic normativity.

Thus I am seeking to combine the principal themes of the last two chapters in order to satisfy two motivations - the 'bottom-up' motivation to display the normative character of communicative language use, and the 'top-down' pressure to preserve something of the theoretical tractability purchased by distinguishing meaning from force (and which enshrines the autonomy of meaning from the psychological context of action).

I argue that an account which follows the main outlines of Jurgen Habermas's 'formal pragmatics' (1979b, 1984) can achieve these aims, although with important qualifications. If I am right in this, then an important residual question concerning the cost of taking this pragmatic turn, particularly with respect to the analytic traditions

understanding of the philosophical concern with meaning, can be broached. I conclude this chapter with the thought that this cost might be more modest than theoreticians (including Habermas) might, at first, think.

### **Guide to the chapter**

As this is a long chapter, I shall first offer a brief guide to its structure. I have also titled each section to assist in orientating the reader through the discussion.

I begin in section 1 with a preliminary discussion of the central concept of the kind of discursive pragmatics I favour - validity. In section 2, I introduce four theses endorsed by Habermas which connect the notion of validity to Austinian speech act theory. These theses orientate the discussion which follows (though, by necessity this is not entirely linear). I trace the role of Austin's thinking in making available a generalisable notion of linguistic correctness in section 3, before outlining the detail of Habermas's 'validity theoretic' interpretation of speech act theory in section 4. In section 5 I introduce the issue of the meaning-relevance of this framework, initially by tracing the (essentially inferentialist) relation between meaning and validity, and its historical treatment in Frege and Wittgenstein. This is followed in section 6 by an examination of the centrality of the concept of the illocutionary, in particular to developing a notion of communicative rationality. I then turn, in what might seem a digression, to Searle's criticisms of Habermas, which I think nicely recapitulate the question of the matter of the role of communication in an account of language. I resist Searle's objections. I finally

address the question of the plausibility of the idea of a pragmatic theory of meaning in section 8. I criticise Habermas for his failure to acknowledge the central role of assertions in a discursive pragmatics, but endorse his contribution to the development of a notion of communicative action. I show that, within the Austinian framework he outlines, his concerns about traditional semantic approaches to meaning, can be domesticated. I conclude in the final chapter by reconnecting the debate to the question of normativity.

## **1. Language and Validity: Some preliminaries**

According to Habermas, ‘the task of universal pragmatics is to identify and reconstruct universal conditions of possible understanding’<sup>1</sup>; a task which he goes on to claim consists in ‘reconstructing the universal validity basis of speech’<sup>2</sup>. The notions of *validity* and *conditions of understanding* thus occupy centre stage. Some preliminary clarification will enable us to get a hold on the precise nature of these reconstructive tasks.

(i) The notion of validity is perhaps most familiar in the context of reasoning.

Arguments, and the inferences that compose them, are the kinds of thing which are said to be valid or invalid. Specifically, validity concerns the evaluation of reasoning - an argument or claim is valid if its conclusion is well supported or grounded.<sup>3</sup> Validity is thus connected with a certain idea of rationality - with the possibility of having *good reasons* for one’s claims or actions.

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<sup>1</sup> Habermas, 1979b, p.1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.5.

<sup>3</sup> Needless to say, formal (deductive) validity requires more than support.

The specifically *discursive* gloss on rationality has historical roots in the Greek concept of *logos*, a link which is not lost on Habermas as he seeks to delineate a notion of communicative rationality. On *logos*, he says:

This concept of communicative rationality carries with it connotations based on the central experience of the unconstrained, unifying, consensus-bringing force of argumentative speech, in which different participants overcome their merely subjective views...owing to the mutuality of rationally motivated conviction...<sup>4</sup>

Connotations aside, the stress on the discursive aspect of rationality brings language into focus, as the medium by which we make our thoughts and reasoning explicit. In doing so, in bringing them to expression in language, we literally make *claims* (for example to knowledge) which are thus made susceptible to criticism or challenge, to assessment in terms of validity, and in so doing we assume those challenges can be met by appeal to reasons and/or the drawing of appropriate practical conclusions.

So validity is intimately bound up with the rationality of our claims and actions - and specifically with their *criticisability*, with making them such as to be able to bring reasons to bear, for and against them. But it is not just well-grounded assertions and actions which are rational in this discursive sense. As Habermas notes, what he calls 'normatively regulated actions', e.g. promising, and 'expressive self-presentations', e.g. avowals, are susceptible to rational assessment, and to the demand for demonstration of warrant in the guise of good reasons and reasoning. They are thus equally connected to criticisable *validity claims* - claims (whether implicit or explicit) for recognition of the

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<sup>4</sup> Habermas, 1984, p.10.

validity or rightness of one's utterance which can be redeemed discursively, that is in argumentation, through the ability of a speaker to mobilise *reasons* which could meet potential challenge. Thus

we call someone rational ... if he is following an established norm and is able, when criticised, to justify his action by explicating the given situation in the light of legitimate expectations. We even call someone rational if he makes known a desire or intention, expresses a feeling or a mood, shares a secret, confesses a deed, etc., and is then able to reassure critics in regard to the revealed experience by drawing practical consequences from it and behaving consistently thereafter.<sup>5</sup>

This generality is to be expected, since there can be as many forms of rational assessment as there are forms of discourse or argumentation - for example aesthetic, dramaturgical, therapeutic, theoretical and practical discourse etc.<sup>6</sup> The principal issue with which I am concerned, and one which Habermas explores in clarifying a concept of communicative action (to which I will return), concerns the existence of *universal validity claims*, those which inhere in the discursive medium itself, namely speech.<sup>7</sup>

(ii) The idea of a theory of language as a reconstruction of the conditions of understanding, of a competence in a sense familiar in the guise of 'what every speaker knows', is common enough to linguists and philosophers alike. What such projects aim at delivering are reconstructive characterisations of the kind of mastery normal speakers in standard conditions display in understanding/ producing some arbitrary piece of linguistic behaviour, and which (amongst other things) yield interpretations of what is said which

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p.15.

<sup>6</sup> These might correspond to (validity) claims to aesthetic beauty, rhetorical force, sincerity, truth, efficacy or rightness.

<sup>7</sup> As we shall see, there are two related senses in which certain validity claims are held by Habermas to be 'universal': those which are raised in the performance of every (illocutionary) speech act; and those which, where they are valid, are so *for everyone*.

would be acceptable to speakers in those conditions. Habermas explores the idea that communicative speech is susceptible to the kind of formal-reconstructive analysis as meaning is to the formal semanticist, or syntax is to the transformational grammarian. Indeed, using Chomsky's approach to grammatical competence as paradigmatic of analyses of what he calls 'rule-consciousness', Habermas suggests that we can likewise develop a model of *communicative competence* which transforms 'a practically mastered pretheoretical knowledge (know how) of competent subjects into an objective and explicit knowledge (know that)'.<sup>8</sup>

However, Habermas importantly looks to go beyond concern with the conventions and rules by which we service particular communicative ends. The concern with pragmatic (in addition to semantic-syntactic) aspects of the 'generative accomplishments' of speakers is certainly a kindred thought to Searle's (1969) development of speech act theory as a rule governed form of behaviour. What is distinctive about Habermas's approach to pragmatics is the attempt to get beyond a description of 'speech-act-typical rules'<sup>9</sup> and to look at the nature of the co-ordinating effect of participation in speech acts in general in order to establish the *universal* presuppositions of the processes of reaching understanding in speech. Again, Habermas stands to (empirical) pragmatics as Chomsky stands to the grammarian of English, or French or Swahili.

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<sup>8</sup> Habermas, 1979b, p.15.

<sup>9</sup> Such rules are the domain of what he calls 'empirical pragmatics' with its concern with exhaustively cataloguing the actual rules governing speech acts in all their diversity, e.g. that in promising, the thing promised should not obviously be something done by the promiser in the normal course of events.

## 2. Four theses and three abstractions

Habermas sees the formal semantic tradition in particular as guilty of three ‘abstractions’: a ‘semanticist’ abstraction which supposes that one can analyse meaning in terms of the properties of sentences in abstraction from their pragmatic context; a ‘cognitivist’ abstraction which privileges the assertoric or representational function of language; and an ‘objectivist’ abstraction which interprets validity (for them, truth conditions) independently of the knowledge of the grounds for redeeming claims to validity.<sup>10</sup> He sees the central ingredients of his alternative account anticipated in the development of Austin’s views on speech acts. In his recent ‘A Reply’<sup>11</sup>, Habermas traces his link to an Austinian speech act theory in terms of four theses, which we can use to orient the discussion:

- (i) interpreting the generic pragmatic functions in terms of a theory of validity;
- (ii) generalising from the concept of truth-conditions to the concept of validity-conditions;
- (iii) taking a (Dummett inspired) ‘epistemic turn’ by connecting these validity conditions to an intersubjective concept of justification via argumentation;
- (iv) recognising *illocutionary* speech acts as the linguistic expression of (the raising of) validity claims which can be redeemed in discourse.

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<sup>10</sup> This seems to be what is sometimes called ‘realism’ in the theory of meaning. Indeed, the objectivist abstraction is what Habermas sees Dummett contesting. Generally, these abstractions enable us to gain some sense of Habermas’s relation to other philosophers of language. Dummett retains the cognitivist abstraction, but jettisons the objectivist; Searle likewise retains the cognitivist abstraction as does Brandom; both reject the semanticist abstraction.

<sup>11</sup> Habermas, 1991a.

If it helps, we can see the first opposing the cognitivist abstraction, the second the semanticist, and the third the objectivist.

### 3. From Austinian ‘rightness’ to validity

The rationale for placing the notion of validity at the service of pragmatics is to offer a general (in the sense of impacting upon language use in all its diversity), and potentially meaning-relevant, characterisation of the idea of linguistic correctness. In this vein, Habermas looks to Austin as having set out on ‘the first steps en route to a theory of speech acts that combines the insights of truth semantics with those of language-game pragmatics’. The insight of formal (‘truth’) semantics is for Habermas an initial working out of the connection between meaning and validity.<sup>12</sup> I turn to this below. ‘Language-game pragmatics’, in a nod to Wittgenstein, loosely introduces the idea of a multiplicity of speech act types and of things done with language. The Austinian position is thus heralded as an attempt to extend or generalise a meaning-relevant notion of the validity of utterances beyond the limits imposed by truth-conditional semantics and a concern with fact-stating.

In detail, the first part of this ‘shift’ involves Austin overcoming the dualism of the illocutionary (performative) and locutionary (constative) and resolving on the *universal* illocutionary-propositional ‘double structure’ of speech acts.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> This ‘insight’ is essentially what informs inferentialism. As we shall see, Frege is historically significant in this regard, for both Habermas and Brandom.

<sup>13</sup> Briefly, Austin initially distinguished performative utterances, like ordering some tea, naming a ship (those linguistic acts which are primarily a matter of doing something, and which are assessed in terms of

Austin moves in this direction when he reconceptualises the two dimensions of judgement, which he had initially correlated with locutionary and illocutionary acts, respectively (truth vs. success), as aspects that are merely analytically separable. *Every* speech act can be judged according to whether it is “right” as well as whether it is “in order”.<sup>14</sup>

It thus consists in an acknowledgement of a structural grounding to the idea of a plurality of ‘dimensions of judgement’, corresponding to different forms of validity that a speaker, however implicitly, claims for her utterance. Austin himself does not get very far in specifying what these might be, because his own inclination is to preserve the hegemony of truth in a loose dimension of “rightness”.

It is essential to realize that ‘true’ and ‘false’, like ‘free’ and ‘unfree’, do not stand for anything simple at all; but only for *a general dimension of being a right or proper thing to say as opposed to a wrong thing*, in these circumstances, to this audience and with these intentions.<sup>15</sup>

Nevertheless, in this mostly implicit liberalisation of ‘dimensions of judgement’ in the analysis of speech acts, Habermas finds a useful framework for his pragmatic analysis of *universal* validity claims; implicit, but unequivocally there. Note in the quotation from Austin the reference to precisely three determinants or dimensions of ‘rightness’ - the circumstances of utterance, the relation to the audience, and the intentions of the speaker. This is clearly a precursor to Habermas’s own universal validity dimensions, which I introduce in the next section.

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their success) from constative utterances (which are primarily the saying of something and which are assessed in terms of their truth). See chapter 1 of Austin, 1971.

<sup>14</sup> Habermas, 1992b, p.71.

<sup>15</sup> Austin, 1971, p.145.

The double-structure of speech acts implies at least two such dimensions - a claim to truth in the propositional component and a claim to what we might provisionally call illocutionary success in the force component. (It is important to recognise that the *propositional* here is a pragmatic category. The propositional component is not to be merely identified with a sentence or other locutionary device, except in the case of constative speech acts (assertions, declarations, etc.). For non-constative speech acts, where a proposition is not expressed, the propositional content would relate to the proposition presupposed.<sup>16</sup>

Importantly, the force component - the so-called force indicator, which in the standard case is a performative clause (such as 'I promise that') - operates to signify the way in which the propositional content is to be taken by a hearer - as an assertion, an order, a promise, an avowal etc. It is, therefore, the business end of a *communicative operation*, its purpose to establish a certain kind of engagement between interlocutors. Loosely, such an engagement will consist in the commitments and expectations/entitlements engendered by the specific communicative purpose which characterises a specific utterance force (speech act).<sup>17</sup> Accordingly, one who seeks to assert, promise, avow etc. signals this by undertaking a set of commitments (characteristic of one who informs, obligates himself, or reveals something about himself) and thus engenders or licenses a set of legitimate expectations in an audience.

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<sup>16</sup> Identifying which proposition this is - granted that a speech act presupposes the truth of many propositions - is a matter of what *claim* to truth is issued by the speech act. 'Stop smoking' raises the claim that you are currently smoking; not, for example, that there is somebody in the room.

<sup>17</sup> This corresponds to what Brandom calls a deontic score.

As we have seen, it is the great merit of the concept of an illocutionary act that the recognition of an offer of a communicative engagement can suffice for its establishment. There exists an openness between interlocutors, and there is a special *reciprocal* character to the engagements thereby entered into. If a speaker intends to  $\psi$  (where  $\psi$  is an illocutionary verb) then a hearer taking her so *suffices* for her actually doing so. Crucially, then, we can expect there to be some essential condition concerning the validity (or legitimacy) of this reciprocal 'engagement' which is signalled by the force indicator of the utterance, and *a condition that the proffered engagement is sincerely meant and entered into*. So, claims to legitimacy and sincerity would both be constitutive features of illocutionary success (i.e. uptake), as characterised above.<sup>18</sup> Identifying the validity basis of speech can thus be seen as the task of revealing the validity claims that *are constitutive of illocutionary speech acts*.

#### 4. The Validity Basis of Speech: Habermas's speech act theory

The main hypothesis of Habermas's theory of language, as anticipated, concerns *the validity basis of speech* - specifically, that anyone 'acting communicatively must, in performing any speech action, raise universal validity claims and suppose that they can be vindicated or redeemed'.<sup>19</sup> Accordingly, coming to or reaching 'understanding' in the performance of speech acts is bringing about a kind of agreement which 'is based on

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<sup>18</sup> As they are for Searle. Additionally, an illocutionary act requires that the utterance is comprehensible as such. Such conditions are the concern of an account of grammatical competence, such as has been developed by Chomsky.

<sup>19</sup> Habermas, 1979b, p.2. The notion of 'acting communicatively' here involves Habermas's technical notion of communicative action, more on which later.

[mutual] recognition of the corresponding validity claims of ... truth, truthfulness and rightness'.<sup>20</sup> The fundamental thought here is that corresponding to certain generic *pragmatic* functions of language are, according to Habermas's analysis, precisely three kinds of validity claims (which provide the basis for his classification of speech acts). These correspond to the intuitive sense in which, with her utterance, a speaker claims to be:

- giving [the hearer] *something* to understand
- making *herself* thereby understandable; and
- coming to an understanding *with another person*.<sup>21</sup>

These mark what Habermas labels the representational, expressive and interactive functions of language. These pragmatic functions connect to validity claims of (1) 'truth', (2) 'truthfulness' or sincerity, and (3) 'normative rightness' (what I above call 'legitimacy' to avoid confusion with other issues). So, for example, with my assertion that p I am raising the following claims to validity - that p is *true*; that my utterance reflects my genuine belief that p (i.e. that my utterance is 'valid' as an expression of my beliefs, determinable in the light of what I say and do before and subsequently), and that asserting that p is appropriate in the circumstances. Similarly, with my utterance of 'fetch me a glass of water', I am raising the claims: that there is water available and accessible; that I genuinely would like some (rather than that I want to humiliate you); that I am in an

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p.3. 'Mutual' (like 'agreement') adverts to speaker and hearer.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p.2.

appropriate position to expect you to accede to my wishes (say, because you are my junior).

These validity claims in turn provide the three generic categories of speech act - constative, expressive and regulative. Although *every* (illocutionary) speech act raises all three validity claims - this being one sense in which they are 'universal' - only one is raised directly, or is thematically stressed. This stress determines the *type* of speech act under which an utterance falls. So, constatives have a stressed truth claim, expressives a stressed sincerity claim and regulatives a stressed claim to normative rightness.

As stated, this pragmatic structure is realised in the performance of *illocutionary* acts. It is, then, uniquely in the performance of such acts that one raises *validity* claims (which Habermas often contrasts with what he calls *power* claims, see below).

Specifically, these universal validity claims correspond to the constitutive conditions for performing illocutionary acts. They relate, that is, to the conditions for some wholly overt communicative engagement - the truth conditions of some propositional content (either explicit or implicit in the utterance's existential presuppositions), and the conditions for the engagement signalled by the utterance's force indicating component/s. With her utterance then, a speaker claims validity, with varying degrees of stress and however implicitly, under these indices. (1) Truth is evident enough - the speaker claims validity for the proposition expressed (or presupposed). (2) Sincerity, or truthfulness relates to the validity of the utterance as an expression of the speakers intentions. (3) 'Normative

rightness' relates to the validity of the interpersonal relation or engagement signalled by the force of the utterance. Let us look at this latter as it is the least obvious.

In the interactive use of language, in which the interpersonal relation is thematically stressed, we refer in various ways to the validity of the normative context of the speech action.<sup>22</sup>

'Normative rightness' thus concerns the appropriateness or *legitimacy* of the commitments and expectations that characterise an interpersonal engagement. For instance, in issuing promises and orders, utterances assume that an appropriate normative context obtains - in the case of orders, for example, that a speaker can legitimately expect to impose their will, or with promises, that a speaker is in a position to obligate herself to carry something out. Of course it is not just commissive and directive speech acts (those which, respectively, commit the speaker and the hearer to some course of action), but likewise constative and expressive speech acts, that require an appropriate normative context - as Habermas notes, 'communications are sometimes "inappropriate", reports "out of place", confessions "awkward", disclosures "offensive"'.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, this seems right - the issue of appropriateness arises as well for acts of informing, alerting, stating, revealing etc., as for explicitly regulative speech acts, like promising and ordering. One who informs, tells or reveals something, just as one who promises or orders, thereby *authorises* or licenses the commitments and expectations characteristic of those speech acts - and that presupposes the validity of the normative context of the speech act. If we ask in what sense does someone fail to confess something to me, if they tell all and

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p.53.

<sup>23</sup> Habermas, 1984, p.311.

sundry, and in what sense you fail to disclose something to me if what you say is patently obvious to us both, it seems an analogous sense to that in which one fails to promise if one cannot possibly do the thing promised, or one fails to order one's superior. (All this was, of course, said at great length by Austin. See in particular his discussion of the 'infelicities' of stating).<sup>24</sup> In conclusion,

the normative validity claim - rightness or appropriateness  
- is built just as universally into the structure of speech as  
the truth claim.<sup>25</sup>

But in what sense are these really 'universal' aspects of the structure of speech? Clearly some abstraction or analytical limit is being imposed here for this cannot go unqualified. Imagine a transcription of a typical conversation - and ask how many such structures would be - explicitly - present?<sup>26</sup> Accordingly, Habermas is making use of a basic or standard case in his analysis - that of propositionally differentiated, institutionally unbound explicit speech actions.<sup>27</sup> Following Austin, this establishes the (explicit) illocutionary act as the principal analytic unit - and for the same reason: that the illocutionary marks the extent of any distinctly *linguistic* competence. As we shall see,

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<sup>24</sup> Austin, op cit, pp. 136-47. It is, after all, tempting to isolate assertions at this point as having no obvious normative validity claim that is additional to assuming justification for asserting a given proposition (i.e. truth-validity). See Austin's discussion on this, and his remark regarding the comparative purity of statements.

The most that might be argued, and with some plausibility, is that there is no perlocutionary object specifically associated with stating, as there is with informing, arguing, &c.; and *this comparative purity may be one reason why we give 'statements' a certain special position.* But this certainly would not justify giving, say, 'descriptions', if properly used, a similar priority, and it is in any case true of many illocutionary acts. (Ibid, pp.139-40, my italics).

<sup>25</sup> Habermas, 1979b, p.54.

<sup>26</sup> An example: A: Hi      B: A'right      A: How's it going?      B: Not bad. Yourself?

<sup>27</sup> Habermas, 1979b, pp. 34-40. 'Propositionally differentiated' means that they have, and are discriminable in terms of, propositional content; 'institutionally unbound' means that they are not circumscribed by a particular institutional norm - such as marriage or a game of cricket; and 'explicit' means that they can be prefixed by an explicit performative clause, such as 'I assert that' or 'You are requested to'.

there is a further sense in which the illocutionary structure is universal - having to do with the special relationship between illocutionary acts and discursively redeemable validity claims; that is, a context-transcendent notion of validity.

## **5. Meaning and validity**

Habermas connects his account of speech acts with a validity theoretic account of meaning - specifically, of linguistic understanding as knowledge of the 'acceptability conditions' of speech acts. I return to this below. First, I discuss the general link between the concepts of meaning and validity.

As I have mentioned, part of the theoretical point of distinguishing between empirical and formal (or universal) pragmatics<sup>28</sup> is to emphasise that the latter is relevant to the study of meaning (indeed, furnishes us with a formal-pragmatic analysis of meaning). Habermas looks to certain themes in Wittgenstein and Dummett as grounding his 'validity-theoretic' approach as an approach to linguistic meaning. The meaning-relevance of his account turns crucially on the connection he seeks to identify between the concepts of meaning and validity, and which I will ultimately argue is a generalisation of the inferentialist-Socratic insight extended beyond a narrow focus on propositional content.

Firstly, Habermas sees Wittgenstein's rule-following considerations as concerned with the relation between meaning and validity, in the sense of being an examination of

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<sup>28</sup> Habermas has tended to use 'formal' rather than 'universal' pragmatics as a label for his account since his 1984. As far as I am concerned, they denote the same theory.

rules of use and their normative force. This, if the main thrust of chapter 3 is right, seems plausibly so construed. The upshot for Habermas is that the very possibility of meaning is connected with the availability of a *criterion of judgement* for rule-conformity (and which, he understands, is necessarily *intersubjective* - that is, such a criterion involves at least two perspectives, two interchangeable roles (viz. agent and critic), with a rule thus being *valid* for them both).<sup>29</sup> For Habermas' Wittgenstein, this forms part of severing the Tractarian connection between meaning and representation:

Wittgenstein introduces the internal relation of meaning and validity independent of the world-relation of language [representation]; he therefore does not connect the rules for the meaning of words with the truth-validity of sentences.<sup>30</sup>

But, significantly, a meaning-relevant idea of validity is not so alien to the semantic tradition or its aspirations the later Wittgenstein seeks to reject. In his historical excursions, Habermas identifies Frege's semantic revolution from the word to the sentence as the primary unit of semantic significance as a seminal moment in the development of the pragmatic turn, for 'only with sentences are speakers able to say something specific or, in Frege's words, express a "thought"', that is a *judgeable content*.<sup>31</sup> This marks 'a crucial insight ... into the internal connection between meaning and validity'. The initial Fregean development of truth-conditional semantics derives from this concern with the content of judgements, with a sentence's assertability.

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<sup>29</sup> See Habermas, 1992b, p.68. I stress that this is Habermas's take on Wittgenstein. Note also that agent and critic need only be functionally, rather than numerically, distinct.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p.69, my insertion.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p.61.

Thus truth semantics developed the thesis that the meaning of a sentence is determined by its truth condition. The internal connection between the *meaning* of a linguistic expression and the *validity* of a sentence formed with its help was first worked out, then, for the dimension of the linguistic representation of states of affairs.<sup>32</sup>

It is a shift which alters the focus of the philosophy of language - away from the primacy of designation and reference toward the primacy of judgement and inference.<sup>33</sup>

A second point of contact, which assumes considerable importance for Habermas, is that the notion of truth offers a context-transcendent concept of an utterance's validity. This can be contrasted with a view we might label 'conventionalist', and which attempts to exploit the connection between meaning and validity in terms of what I earlier called language-game pragmatics - stressing the significance of vocal actions as legitimate moves within conventional practices or language games. The conventionalist thus

instead ... compares the validity of meaning conventions with the social acceptability of practices and institutions.<sup>34</sup>

The moral Habermas draws - analogous to, though I argue more modest than, that of Wittgenstein - is that a general account of the relation between meaning and validity drives us to a shift from formal semantics *to formal pragmatics*.<sup>35</sup> One can discern two reasons for thinking this shift to be necessary. Firstly, according to Habermas, on

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<sup>32</sup> Habermas, 1984, p.277. Importantly, as we see later, Habermas himself is keen to distance himself from the conventionalist (see below) aspect of this 'shift', irrespective of whether it is something Wittgenstein himself endorsed.

<sup>33</sup> Habermas, 1992b, p.62. For similar thoughts on Frege's role in the pragmatic turn and the development of inferentialism, see Brandom (1994), chapters 1 and 2.II.

<sup>34</sup> Habermas, 1984, p.277. An example of this kind of conventional activity might indeed be the builders' language games described by Wittgenstein at the beginning of his 1958b .

<sup>35</sup> The shift is 'analogous' in the sense of moving the centre of gravity in an account of language toward the practical significance of speech action. However, it is crucially different in jettisoning the idea that this significance is to be understood in terms of a notion of the contextually or institutionally-bound acceptability of conventional practices.

examination the relation between meaning and validity reveals the essentially *discursive* context of meaningfulness - i.e. validity claims are redeemed discursively; that is challenges are met through the speaker's ability to mobilise credible reasons (those which could motivate acceptance). This involves commitment to the idea that one cannot explicate the notion of validity (or validity conditions) independently of the concept of *raising* validity claims, and the typically discursive practices by which those claims are *redeemed*. I return to this below and in the section on Searle. Secondly there is the belief that the relation between meaning and validity is not exhausted in terms of truth-conditions, a thought endorsed to varying degrees in the later Wittgenstein and Austin. We need, that is, a more generous construal of the relation, one capable of revealing how the basic mechanisms of discursive practice impact upon the diversity of linguistic acts.

(A parallel argument is found in Brandom, of course. However, Brandom sees the relation between pragmatics and formal semantics differently, since the notion of inference functions for him as a key concept (see chapter 6, #6). Acknowledging the foundational role of discursive practices - those of giving and asking for reasons - does not, for him, compel us to any radical shift in the character of a theory of meaning).

In what sense do the validity-theoretic analogues of truth conditions have a bearing on the *meaning* of an utterance, rather than, as in the case of speech-act-typical rules, some (putatively) quite separable notion of an utterance's success? Even if we grant that validity conditions are built into the formal structure of speech, can we make sense of a

formal-pragmatic analysis of *meaning*? Such a view does not sit well with Austin's explicit pronouncements on meaning and force, and is resisted by Searle, despite sharing a basic commitment to the Gricean idea that an analysis of meaning is, in the first instance at least, an analysis of what it is *for someone to mean something*. Clearly, a Habermasian response to Austin here is going to make much of the move to interpreting 'rightness' in terms of an account of validity, and the discursive character of the pragmatic theory thereby made available.

It is important to reflect on Habermas's claim that his theory of language, as an approach to meaning, involves a generalisation of Michael Dummett's critique of truth-conditional semantics. Indeed, the shift to assertability conditions in the theory of meaning is just the kind of move which Habermas seeks to generalise in his pragmatics:

I want to explain understanding an utterance by knowledge of the conditions under which a hearer may accept it. *We understand a speech act when we know what makes it acceptable.*<sup>36</sup>

Dummett contends that knowledge of truth-conditions is a problematic model for understanding the meaning of whole classes of sentences, specifically those for which there exists no decision procedure for determining their truth value. He thus distinguishes knowing the truth conditions from knowing the *grounds* that entitle a speaker to assert a sentence as true, proposing the latter as the central concept of a theory of linguistic understanding. Habermas is sympathetic to this 'epistemic turn':

It is part of understanding a sentence that we are capable of recognising *grounds* through which the *claim* that its truth-conditions are

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<sup>36</sup> Habermas, 1984, p.297.

satisfied *could be redeemed*.<sup>37</sup>

Indeed, part of his strategy of generalisation involves introducing a shift from assertability conditions to what he calls an utterance's *acceptability conditions*, commensurate with his rejection of the various abstractions he finds in formal semantics. It is a notion which applies to utterances (rather than simply sentences or propositions). It applies across the diversity of linguistic acts (rather than simply assertions), and it concerns conditions which require intersubjective recognition. A succinct statement of the core idea of the meaning of an utterance as given by its acceptability conditions is given by Habermas thus:

A speech act may be called "acceptable" if it satisfies the conditions that are necessary in order that the hearer be allowed to take a "yes" position on the claim raised by the speaker. These conditions cannot be satisfied one-sidedly, either relative to the speaker or to the hearer. They are rather conditions for the intersubjective recognition of a linguistic claim which ...grounds a specified agreement concerning obligations...<sup>38</sup>

Crucially the conditions are for *rationally* motivated 'acceptance'. (This is why appeal is made to the illocutionary/perlocutionary distinction, so we keep bullying, or other forms of 'motivation' out of the frame. See below). There is, then, a double sense in which validity claims are 'universal' - structurally, in the sense of being a component of *all* illocutionary speech acts, but also in the sense that where claims are valid, they are so for *everyone*.<sup>39</sup>

So, in generalising, we get a clearer sense of the *discursive* nature of the redemption of *validity* claims in contrast to the 'monological' nature of procedures of

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p.317.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p.298.

<sup>39</sup> As is stressed by Maeve Cooke, 1994, p.63.

verification/ falsification. The grounds through which validity claims are redeemed require intersubjective recognition - that is, through their function in a potential process of argumentation. This for Habermas is one of the principal motivations for shifting to a formal-pragmatic analysis.

Importantly for us, the generalisation of the notion of 'grounds' serves to mark Habermas's commitment to a shift to an inferentialism about meaning. Moreover, the shift to a concern with grounds or justification for claims, according to Habermas, invites a pragmatic turn in the analysis of meaning - specifically a discursive model of justification conditions.

A central issue thus becomes whether the Habermasian pragmatic turn flouts a basic commitment to preserving a semblance of the meaning/force distinction introduced by Frege, and which is a cornerstone of the analytic tradition's conception of the project of a *theory of meaning*. What kind of departure is Habermas urging in the suggested move from formal semantics to formal pragmatics (in his special sense)? For example, can the notion of validity (or acceptability) operate as something like a 'key concept' (in an analogous way to, say, Brandom's claim for the concept of inference)? I return to the notion of a key concept later, and, in the section after next, to Searle's representationalist account of illocutionary speech acts.

## 6. Illocutionary acts and communicative action

Why the stress on *illocutionary* acts? What is special about the communicative engagements they facilitate? Indeed, we must be careful to clarify the sense of 'communicative' concerned, if the illocutionary structure of speech acts is to be interpretable in validity, and thus potentially meaning-theoretic terms. After all, many acts of communication have little or nothing to do with 'reaching understanding', the aim rather being to manipulate an audience to serve individuals' strategic ends. Furthermore, many communicative linguistic acts do not require that the speaker's aims be overt in the way characteristic of illocutionary acts (some seem actually to require that these ends are hidden, such as persuading and misleading). So Habermas is using the notion of an illocutionary act - and in particular its *distinctness from the perlocutionary act* - to underwrite his rather special concept of communicative action:

Thus I count as communicative action those linguistically mediated interactions in which all participants pursue illocutionary aims, and *only* illocutionary aims.<sup>40</sup>

From this it is clear that the notion of the illocutionary act is an abstraction - but this is a virtue. This formulation acknowledges that speakers can and do use language and, specifically, illocutionary acts in the service of their strategic ends - one lies and persuades with assertions, one can frighten, annoy, bring to his senses, an audience with one's promises, orders, questions etc. But they are *just* that, means to ends, rather than ends (such as understanding) in themselves. Likewise, the kind of 'agreement' and

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<sup>40</sup> Habermas, 1984, p.295. He also distinguishes communicative action in terms of pursuing illocutionary aims 'without reservation'.

‘understanding’ caught up in perlocutionary acts (besides those constitutive of the illocutionary acts performed by them) are functions of the causal influence individuals can exert, the expression of what Habermas calls ‘a contingent will’, *in contrast to being a result of the mutually motivating force of reasons*.<sup>41</sup>

I have been stressing since the last chapter that illocutionary acts are distinguished by the communicative engagement they facilitate. Let us call this feature, following Hornsby, *reciprocity*.<sup>42</sup> This bond between interlocutors, we have seen, is not something to be understood in terms of our internalisation of the same rules or conventions governing the meaning of words, but is rather something Habermas invites us to understand in terms of a shared procedural resource to which interlocutors can advert in the process of interpretation. His account clarifies this reciprocity in terms of the *co-ordinating power of reasons* - specifically through the mechanism of mutual recognition of what would redeem the validity claims raised by an utterance. Because validity claims are redeemed discursively, that is in processes of *argumentation*, where challenges are demands for demonstration of justification or warrant, illocutionary acts co-ordinate interlocutors in a quite distinctive way.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> The contrast here is with that sense of agreement and understanding as exemplified in cases where guns are held to heads, and in ‘offers’ one can’t refuse.

<sup>42</sup> See Hornsby, 1998, *passim*.

<sup>43</sup> Of course, to say that claims to, for example sincerity, are redeemed in argumentation seems odd, since typically I demonstrate my sincerity through my behaviour rather than with reasons (e.g. reassurances). The point of appeal to the discursive redemption of claims to sincerity (and to normative rightness) concerns cases *where challenges are issued* to them, and where the speaker is thus charged with motivating acceptance by mobilising reasons. These, of course, will typically advert to past and future behaviour - that is, to evidence of the speaker’s standing obligation to draw appropriate practical conclusions from his disclosures and behave accordingly.

I drew attention earlier to the nexus of commitments and expectations that characterises each particular speech act type. So, when Habermas speaks of the 'binding force' of illocutionary acts, he has in mind the distinctive manner by which these commitments, undertaken in the performance of such speech acts, take on the character of obligations - to demonstrate entitlement or warrant, something on which the hearer can rely.<sup>44</sup>

The bond into which the speaker is willing to enter with the performance of an illocutionary act means a guarantee that, in consequence of his utterance, he will fulfil certain conditions - for example, regard a question as settled when a satisfactory answer is given; drop an assertion when it proves to be false; follow his own advice when he finds himself in the same situation as the hearer; stress a request when it is not complied with; act in accordance with an intention disclosed by avowal, and so on.<sup>45</sup>

This is categorically different from the way in which perlocutionary acts (and institutionally bound speech acts) co-ordinate interlocutors. With the former, an utterance's ability to co-ordinate action is connected to power claims - attempts to persuade, alarm, assure etc. succeed insofar as they are backed by sufficient influence. With institutionally bound speech acts - marrying, baptising, appointing, giving 'out' in a game of cricket etc. - the ability of an utterance to co-ordinate action is borrowed from the institutional norm itself, and it thus has 'social force' (partly explicable in terms of the existence of sanctions). In contrast,

The illocutionary force of an acceptable speech act consists in the fact that it can *move* a hearer to rely on the speech-act-typical commitments of the speaker.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Without, for example, having to keep a check on the speaker's higher order intentions.

<sup>45</sup> Habermas, 1979b, p.62.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, p.62. My emphasis.

Thus, through their relation to criticisable validity claims, speech act typical commitments take on the character of obligations, for example

- to provide grounds (in the case of a challenged truth claim);
- to prove trustworthy/sincere (in the case of a challenged truthfulness claim);
- to provide warrant (in the case of a challenged rightness claim).

The reciprocity of illocutionary acts is thus made sense of in terms of a speaker's ability to *rationally motivate* acceptance of a speech act 'offer', through the mechanism of the mutual recognition of (thematically stressed) validity claims and to the possibility of their discursive redemption.

For Habermas then, the illocutionary/perlocutionary distinction services his crucial distinction between communicative and strategic action (or communicative as against cognitive-instrumental rationality). Communicative actions involve constitutive relations between their aims and the means of achieving them, in contrast to the causal relations between the aims and means of strategic action. The focus on illocutionary acts - as acts specifically 'oriented to reaching understanding' - is precisely due to their isolability, so to speak, from the perlocutionary 'noise' of strategic action. Thus the conditions for the success of communicative actions uniquely concern the conditions required to *rationally* secure their (illocutionary) aims. *This use of Austin's notion to clarify a concept of communicative rationality - a kind of rationality that is essentially realised in linguistic communication - is key to my attempt to understand the normativity of normativity.*

## 7. Searle versus Habermas on validity

Searle (1991) rejects both the Grice-Strawson claim that communication is essential to an account of linguistic meaning and the validity-theoretic analysis of speech acts and illocutionary force associated with Habermas. This poses a fundamental challenge to the main thrust of the claims made in recent chapters, which has aimed to make sense of building the latter's analysis of speech acts onto the former's pragmatic insights. Besides the fact that Searle is just about the only analytic commentator to have engaged with Habermas's proposals, the debate between them concerns both the central question of the role of communication and the use of the illocutionary as a means of clarifying this. Ultimately, Searle wants to ground an analysis of speech acts in a theory of intentionality, where Habermas wants to ground it in a theory of (discursive) rationality. I will defend the latter view of speech acts, and reiterate the Grice-Strawson thesis that communication is central to them.

Searle's account of linguistic meaning can be seen as an attempt to preserve Gricean intentionalism - that meaning reduces to speaker meaning or that meaning derives from the content of a speaker's non-linguistic intentions - but purged of the claim that a speaker's intention to communicate is in any way essential to meaning. He claims that a speaker's intention to communicate a belief, desire or whatever to a hearer cannot be essential to meaning 'because one can say something and mean something by it and not have that intention'.<sup>47</sup> His motivation for this claim concerns so-called 'no intended

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<sup>47</sup> Searle, 1991, p.86.

audience' cases, such as where I dutifully perform an utterance in the full knowledge that my audience is not paying attention, doesn't hear, can't understand, doesn't exist etc., and wherein one can clearly say that I mean *something* by my utterance, although my speech act may remain in some (non-semantic) sense defective. Moreover, Searle claims that 'even in the normal case where the speaker does intend to communicate, there must be some meaning to be communicated. Thus ... we must separate the intention which is the essence of meaning from the intention to communicate'.<sup>48</sup>

Such a picture stands in stark opposition to the Gricean insight, which I defended in chapter 5 with the aid of Strawson's argument against the 'bogus' compound model of speech acts as consisting of meaning plus communicative intent; a model Searle must have in mind when he endorses the thought that 'with meaningful utterances we can carve off the intention to communicate to some hearer and still have a meaningful utterance left over'.<sup>49</sup> A lot seems to turn here, vis-a-vis diagnosing the relevance of what Searle labels 'no-communication' cases, on the rather slippery intuition of there being 'meaning to be communicated'. Searle is happy to acknowledge that the 'normal' case of meaningful utterance is the communication case, but argues that the 'primary' case is not. In chapter 5 I attacked this lowest common denominator thinking about meaning as issuing in the objectionable bifurcation of competencies, but I did not explicitly address the no-communication cases. I want to take a moment to respond, before looking at Searle's criticism of Habermas.

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid, p.86.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, p.86.

Searle's view is that since we *can* make sense of exercises of a semantic competence - meaning something by saying something - independently of communicative success (i.e. uptake on the part of some audience), then meaning must really be prior to the ability to communicate. As I have been putting it, semantic competence must be an independent expressive resource, grounded (in Searle's account) in our ability to intentionally represent states of affairs (see below). But *can* we make sense of such exercises? I think not. I do not agree that in observing 'no intended audience/no communication' cases we thereby make sense of doing something independent of the ability to communicate. We can certainly envisage a basketball player shooting baskets in his backyard, refining his basketball skills or just for pleasure, but what he is doing *makes no sense independently of the concept of a game of basketball*.<sup>50</sup> There is no temptation to suppose that 'shooting baskets' is prior to basketball play. Of course, Searle takes his view to be consistent with the claim that the *purpose* of meaningful speech is communication. However, as the basketball example makes clear, the point is not merely about the *purpose* of shooting baskets. We do not have to tie what he is doing to any particular point or purpose to 'shooting baskets'. In other words the activity doesn't have to be *practice*. That is, the example need not be of someone explicitly behaving *as if* they were in a game of basketball (or a normal communicative exchange). Nevertheless, it remains the case that what he is doing is a derivative activity, derived from the normal context of the activity with the normal consequences of actions in that context (e.g. points

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<sup>50</sup> This example is given by Patrick Suppes, 1986, p. 120. Of course, the example need not be of someone who ever has, or ever will play a game of basketball.

scoring). So it is with language. Using language is also a *complex* skill in that it can be put to many uses in many contexts (soliloquy, rhetoric, leaving notes to posterity) alongside ordinary communication. But we should resist allowing this to slide into the idea that it is therefore *compound* - an expressive skill which can be subsequently deployed, typically, to service communication.

I also think part of the problem with Searle is that he mistakes the character of the intentions relevant to communication (he is, on that score, *too* Gricean). See below.

To return to Searle's account, what, then, does he take to be the meaning-constituting intentions? Following on from Austin's rejection of the performative/constative dichotomy, Searle acknowledges that meaning is modal. The crucial intentions are intentions to represent states of affairs in some mode or other (assertively, directly etc.). In accordance with the analysis of speech acts, the content to be communicated has thus the illocutionary-propositional structure 'F(p)', and so it is 'the intention to produce an object with that form that constitutes saying something and meaning something by it'.<sup>51</sup>

Fleshing this out a little, we can see the fundamental role of Searle's notion of 'conditions of satisfaction'. To mean something by one's utterance is, according to Searle, to give or impose conditions of satisfaction on one's utterance - to commit to one's utterances having such conditions. To mean an utterance assertively is to commit to its having certain truth-conditions, to mean an utterance directly is to commit to its

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<sup>51</sup> Searle, op cit, p.86.

having fulfilment conditions, etc. Utterances inherit their conditions of satisfaction from the corresponding intentions. My utterance that p is a meaningful utterance in virtue of being the expression of my intention to (e.g. assertively) represent that p. The other 'modes of meaning' are to be determined by the 'direction of fit' by which representations are brought into accord with their objects. To reiterate, an utterance's having the content F(p) is purely a matter of its having conditions of satisfaction.

Searle's view is that we should separate the intention relevant to meaning, from the intention relevant to communication. This latter, according to his Gricean analysis, is the higher-order intention to get a hearer to recognise the primary (meaning relevant) intention to represent some state of affairs (in some mode). For Searle, illocutionary intentions are complex, Gricean, intentions, involving the intention to represent and the intention that this intention be recognised.

So, what matters to meaning is that an utterance *have* conditions of satisfaction. Of course, the successful performance of an illocutionary speech act is constituted by more than an utterance having conditions of satisfaction - most notably uptake.<sup>52</sup> Part of the analysis of speech acts must then be to explain how conditions for the *communicative* success of utterances (e.g. for Searle, fulfilment conditions on higher-order communicative intentions) depend upon an utterance's satisfaction conditions. So, if the claim that what determines the essential (illocutionary) character of meaningful speech

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<sup>52</sup> Of course, consonant with the presentation above, 'uptake' is a complex condition, since it involves not just the recognition or acceptance of the speech act on the part of an audience, but those necessary conditions on such a communicative engagement - e.g. that an appropriate normative context obtains, that the engagement is sincerely entered into.

acts is specifiable independently of the conditions for their communicative success is to be defended, then it is incumbent upon the account to show how those other conditions are related to the conditions of satisfaction. (To reiterate, it is no part of Searle's analysis to deny that normal, successful speech acts are communicative, or to deny that successful illocutionary acts involve intentions to communicate; rather they just aren't necessary to a speech act being meaningful and in a particular mode).

Such a view of the determination of meaning and illocutionary force clearly conflicts with the account developed by Habermas. This much is clear from the strong bifurcation of meaning and communication that Searle urges. What, though, is the specific disagreement?

Recall that Habermas distinguishes the *conditions* of the 'validity' of utterances from the *claims* with which speakers seek recognition of their validity, and from the *vindication or redemption* of (justified) validity claims.<sup>53</sup> His most challenging claim, which he conceives as a generalisation of Dummett's move vis-a-vis truth conditions, is that the concept of the *conditions* of validity of an utterance cannot be explicated independently of the concept of *redeeming* the *claims* to validity that an utterance raises. For Habermas, a meaningful speech act is performed if it is possible that a hearer take a 'yes' position on the *claim/s* raised by its utterance. So for Habermas, it is insufficient for the performance of a meaningful (illocutionary) speech act that one's utterance *have*

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<sup>53</sup> We can avoid unnecessary complication if we see validity conditions as, at least, analogues of conditions of satisfaction - as what an utterance requires to fall under some illocutionary type.

validity conditions - rather, the speaker with his utterance makes a *claim* that his utterance is valid (and which assumes that the claim can be *redeemed*). In a more familiar idiom, his utterance expresses his implicit *endorsement* of an inference; it is meaningful by being caught up in a practice of giving (and asking for) *reasons*.

With a speech act, the speaker gives the addressee not only the chance to learn of his intentions. He claims further that he has reasons that can move the hearer to accept a statement as true, an order as legitimate, a promise as binding or ... an avowal as sincere.<sup>54</sup>

The disagreement, as Habermas sees it, concerns

whether the meaning of a speech act is determined by the satisfaction conditions of a representational content imposed on the linguistic expression or whether it has to be explained in terms of validity conditions that only gain their determination by an interpretational process terminating in the intersubjective recognition of corresponding validity claims.<sup>55</sup>

This seems to me a good characterisation of the underlying disagreement between representationalists and inferentialists. Searle does not deny that such things as what Habermas calls validity conditions - truth, truthfulness, 'normative rightness' - are part of what it is to perform speech acts. Indeed he sees them as his own 'various conditions generalised'.<sup>56</sup> However, he thinks that in his analysis of speech acts Habermas has the role of validity *claims*, which are attempts to gain recognition for an utterance's validity, back to front - rather (as noted above) they should be a consequence, not a presupposition, of such an analysis; and furthermore that they *are* consequences of, i.e. are explained by, his (Searle's) account in terms of intentionality or 'conditions of

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<sup>54</sup> Habermas, 1991b, p.25.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, p.19.

<sup>56</sup> Searle, op cit, p.98.

satisfaction'. Borrowing the idiom of validity, the fact that one makes certain validity *claims* is a consequence of 'the most fundamental features of the intentionality of the phenomena' viz. that one is intentionally representing a state of affairs.<sup>57</sup> I return to this below.

So, in a move analogous to his rejection of the constitutive nature of communicative intentions, Searle argues that 'one can say something, mean what one says, and not get agreement on the sorts of validity claims that Habermas and Apel discuss',<sup>58</sup> that the attempt to secure agreement, through intersubjective recognition of the utterance's validity, is no part of the meaning of an utterance.

Habermas and Apel have confused the fact that the performance of the speech act commits the speaker to the conditions of its successful performance with the quite independent and, I believe, false claim that the performance of the speech act necessarily involves an attempt to get the hearer to agree with the speaker on a whole series of validity claims.<sup>59</sup>

More generally, for Searle, the 'acceptability' of an utterance is a contingent function of its execution, and thus cannot be used to clarify the concepts of illocutionary force and meaning, since for Searle an unacceptable utterance can still have meaning. Searle objects to what he sees as the role of consensus in Habermas's theory of speech acts. The attempt to achieve consensus, he claims, cannot be constitutive of speech acts or indeed

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p.93. For Habermas, Searle's attempted appropriation of the idiom of validity is illegitimate, since there is according to Habermas an 'internal' relation between validity conditions, claims and their redemption. Habermas' Dummettian turn is to defend the thesis that an affirmative answer to the following is not possible;

'...whether the concept of the validity of a sentence can be explicated independently of the concept of redeeming the validity claim raised through the utterance of the sentence'. (1984, p.316).

<sup>58</sup> Searle, op cit, p.99. The reference is to Karl Otto Apel, who has developed a speech act theory similar in detail to that of Habermas, and which he calls 'transcendental pragmatics'

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, p.99.

the concepts of meaning, understanding or even communication, since 'it presupposes all these'.<sup>60</sup> For Searle, the analysis of meaningfulness (concerning the conditions for saying something meaningful) is quite separable from conditions for the successful communicative employment of expressions (viz. uptake).

There are then two points of disagreement, springing from the core issue of the relation between meaning and communication. These concern Searle's twin contention:

- (i) that the illocutionary mode of an utterance can be explained in terms of the conditions of satisfaction on intentions to represent states of affairs;
- (ii) and that what matters to meaningfulness is that utterances *have* conditions of satisfaction, not that a speaker *claims* satisfaction (or validity).<sup>61</sup>

I shall now argue that Searle is wrong on both counts.

(i) The objection to Searle here is simple, and cuts to the heart of a classification of speech acts which imports representationalism into the theory of speech acts - with its concomitant recognition of a single generic pragmatic function which admits just two agent-world relations or 'directions of fit'; ascertaining facts (viz. where representations fit the facts) and achieving a goal or bringing about a state of affairs (viz. where the facts are made to fit the representations). The defining characteristic of this approach is then the idea that 'illocutionary aims can be characterised in terms of the direction in which

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid, p.92.

<sup>61</sup> Which is the essence of the objections to the role of agreement or consensus in Habermas's account.

sentences and facts are supposed to be brought into accord'.<sup>62</sup> However, the notion of the illocutionary class of speech acts, as I made clear in the last chapter, cannot be properly understood in terms simply of the possession of conditions of satisfaction.

In particular, the notion of intentional direction of fit offers too narrow a basis for distinguishing Searle's classes of speech acts.<sup>63</sup> It is instructive to see the difficulties he encounters in trying to make his notion of conditions of satisfaction generalise to language uses other than the assertoric. Out of Searle's five proposed 'basic modes' of speech act - constative, directive, commissive, declarative and expressive - only the first can be unproblematically distinguished in terms of representational direction of fit.

Directives (including imperatives and requests) and commissives (including promises, threats and vows) cannot be distinguished solely in terms of their fulfilment-conditions (effecting that p come about). The illocutionary force of a directive speech act, for example, imposes conditions of *legitimacy*, the illocutionary force of commissive speech acts imposes conditions of *obligation*, which are additional to the success-conditions for bringing p about. What distinguishes *illocutionary* aims - to order, request, assert, avow - is the kind of normative interpersonal *bond* they seek to establish. So directives bind the will of (in the sense of *obligate*) a hearer, where commissives (publicly) bind the will of the speaker.

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<sup>62</sup> Habermas, 1984, p.323.

<sup>63</sup> There is something of this in what led Wittgenstein to abandon the idea of a unitary relation of validity, such as correspondence with facts, in the later philosophy.

Declaratives and expressives prove even more awkward for Searle - the latter is explicitly acknowledged to be *beyond* capture in terms of either word-world direction of fit, while the former is awkwardly attributed the hybrid characteristic of *both*.<sup>64</sup> (Declaratives are problematic precisely because they are largely institutional speech acts, where the aim is to bind action to an institutional norm, such as the conventions of diplomatic relations/warfare).

In contrast, the broader, validity-theoretic analysis offers a more flexible ordering of basic modes (although narrowed to three) perceivable even within the representationalist idiom of word-world relations of fit.

The model intuitively introduced here is that of a communication in which grammatical sentences are embedded, by way of universal validity claims, in three relations to reality, thereby assuming the corresponding pragmatic functions of representing facts, establishing legitimate interpersonal relations, and expressing one's own subjectivity. According to this model, language can be conceived as the medium of interrelating three worlds; for every successful communicative action there exists a threefold relation between the utterance and (a) "the external world" as the totality of existing states of affairs, (b) "our social world" as the totality of all normatively regulated interpersonal relations that count as legitimate in a given society, and (c) "a particular inner world" (of the speaker) as the totality of his intentional experiences.<sup>65</sup>

One suggestion I am concerned with is that a theory of speech acts which offers a plausible rationalisation of the systematic uses or illocutionary forces of utterances should dispense with the single-value conception of the validity of utterances, that is, with the idea that they can be ordered one-dimensionally. (And yet in offering such a rationalisation at all satisfies one of the fundamental desiderata of a 'key concept').

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<sup>64</sup> See Searle, 1979, p.19.

<sup>65</sup> Habermas, 1979b, p.67.

Another way of seeing the shortcoming here is to look at the representationalist order of explanation. It is a central claim of Searle's that his analysis of speech acts *explains* the kinds of validity claim they raise in terms of the properties of the intentions to represent in virtue of which, on his analysis, utterances are meaningful.<sup>66</sup> So, the idea would be that the claims to truth, sincerity and appropriateness (or suitable analogues) *are consequences of the imposing of conditions of satisfaction on the intentions to represent involved*. Pace Habermas, conditions of satisfaction (or more generously, validity) are explicable independently/antecedently of validity *claims*, which are further downstream, as it were.

I am, however, unpersuaded that conditions of satisfaction on intentions to (assertively, directive, etc.) represent do explain or entail *claims* that those conditions are satisfied/redeemed. Searle argues that if one intentionally represents (assertively) a state of affairs, then that intention a) commits one to the existence of that state of affairs; b) is thus an expression of a belief in its existence; and c) thus commits one to having reasons or evidence for it. Correspondingly in the linguistic case, if one states something then one is a) committed to the truth of a proposition, and b) thus expressing a belief in its truth (sincerity), which c) engenders an obligation on the speaker's part to have reasons or evidence for it. Notice the primacy of the first, and which Searle calls the 'essential', condition - the others derive from that commitment engendered by one's intention to

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<sup>66</sup> Searle, 1991.

represent, and this presumably is supposed to hold for other ‘modes of meaning’ viz. intentions to *directively*, *commissively*, *expressively* etc. represent alike.

However, in what sense do conditions of satisfaction on such intentions commit one to, e.g. believing in what one asserts (sincerity) and having reasons for it (normative rightness)? So, with regard to this latter, what feature of the *intention* to assertively represent makes my utterance a warranted assertion rather than a mere conjecture? In what sense do the conditions of satisfaction on my *intention* to *directively* represent that p explain the normative claim to authority (for example, over those I legitimately order)? And what feature of my *intention* to *commissively* represent that p makes its (linguistic expression) a promise, rather than an expression of intent (or indeed, an avowal, which is an *expressive* speech act)?

Of course Searle is quite right to hold that one can, for example, perfectly well order someone to do something without any authority to do so (it is a perfectly good illocutionary act), but he is mistaken if he thinks one can do so without *claiming* authority. That is what makes it an order. The fact is that there is no capturing certain constitutive conditions on illocutionary aims by reference ‘to fundamental features of the intentionality of the phenomena’. This should come as no surprise on the view that meaningful utterances are essentially communicative; that illocutionary intentions concern attempts to gain *recognition* of the validity of an utterance.

(ii) One of the main points of contention concerns the role of agreement in Habermas's account - for the very idea of a *claim* to validity as part of the structure of speech acts involves the idea of the constitutive role of *recognition* of the validity claims raised by one's utterance. Searle objects to any constitutive role for what he calls 'seeking agreement', observing that a speaker may issue a meaningful speech act 'and not care at all whether the hearer accepts it, agrees with it, recognises its truthfulness, sincerity, validity, etc.'<sup>67</sup> In other words, the performance of a meaningful speech act can occur where recognition of its validity claims is a matter of complete indifference to the speaker. I may issue an order purely because it is my duty to do so, for example; and, Searle urges, think of Galileo saying 'Eppure si muove' and 'having no intention of getting his hearers to agree to his validity claims, because he knew there was no possibility of their doing so'.<sup>68</sup> Surely we are not to deny that orders and statements are being issued here? And then surely, conditions of possible agreement cannot be constitutive of them (though they may be crucial to their success)?

I think Searle mistakes the nature and role of agreement and consensus in Habermas, and I think this is largely due to his weddedness to intentionalism (that meaning is to be explained in terms of non-linguistic intentions). Indeed, he mistakes the intention to communicate which I have earlier argued is relevant to an account of illocutionary acts. For it seems that Habermas need not deny that the speaker may not actually seek recognition of her utterance's claims to validity - may, that is, actually be

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid, p.98.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, p.99.

indifferent, may not ‘care’ - whilst preserving the commitment to the role of conditions of possible agreement. The only intention a speaker must have is, sure enough, the intention to  $\psi$  that such an such (assert, promise, order, avow, etc.), but she succeeds in  $\psi$ -ing if her utterance *is recognisable as such*. Searle mistakes the nature of the ‘intention to communicate’ which is appealed to - it is not the *intention* to get agreement (‘seeking recognition’) so much as the intention to perform the illocutionary act concerned (generically, the intention to say such and such), and which is normally so performed when the hearer is able to recognise the utterance as such. It is this which points to agreement - since the conditions for recognising the utterance as a performance of a certain illocutionary act *are* the conditions for possible agreement, viz. the conditions for rationally motivated assent/dissent. For recognising an utterance as an assertion is, in part, recognising the speaker’s warrant to provide reasons; recognising an order is, in part, recognising the warrant to provide or demonstrate authority or legitimacy, etc.<sup>69</sup>

Thus the hearer’s cognisance is implicated in the very performance of speech acts, whether the speaker actually intends this or not.

The speaker cannot achieve his illocutionary purpose of conveying a fact, giving an order, making a promise or revealing an experience, if he does not at the same time make known the *conditions* under which his utterance *could* be accepted as valid: that is, in *claiming* that these conditions are satisfied he implicitly offers to provide the reasons for their validity, if necessary... The hearer cannot understand the speech act if he does not know the conditions for taking a yes/no

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<sup>69</sup> Of course, Habermas clarifies his notion of communicative action in terms of the pursuit of solely illocutionary aims, where participants *aim* to reach understanding. But this is no concession to Searle, since this serves only as a specification of a context in which meaning can be clarified. We could not clarify meaning and understanding if it were not legitimate to standardise or normalise contexts of speech actions, thus treating lying, threatening, and Galileo-type situations as deviant.

position.<sup>70</sup>

Thus, for Habermas ‘agreement’ figures as the aim of interpretation; not, as Searle would have him claim, because speech acts are invariably a mechanism for achieving consensus, but because meaningfulness is bound up in the evaluation of reasons, in argumentation, within which the force of the better/good reason is paramount. ‘Agreement’ is a matter of the mutual awareness of what would redeem the claims raised by an utterance. It is in this, rather abstract, sense that language serves to bring about agreement.

### **8. A pragmatic theory of meaning?**

I mentioned above that Habermas’s examination of the validity basis of speech leads him to urge a move away from a formal semantic to a formal pragmatic analysis of meaning. If how I have presented his main themes is accurate, then I think we can reasonably see Brandom’s project as an analogous inquiry into the validity basis of language – how, that is, proprieties governing practices of giving and asking for reasons determine the meaning properties of the states and performances caught up in them. But, of course, Brandom is ultimately concerned to deploy his pragmatics to *underwrite*, rather than displace, formal semantics. Additionally, to complicate matters, Habermas sees his account as nevertheless a generalisation of a kind of truth-conditional approach – largely in virtue of a common stress, as he sees it, upon a relation between the notions of meaning and (a context-transcendent concept of) validity.

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<sup>70</sup> Habermas, 1991b, p.25.

I think we need to look again at the so-called abstractions that Habermas rejects. On reflection, the distance between Habermas and the formal semanticist seems not so great. Recall that Habermas criticises formal semantic approaches to meaning for endorsing a ‘cognitivist abstraction’, which he describes as an unwarranted privileging of the representational function of language, and hence assertoric speech acts, in the determination of meaning. In ‘A Reply’, he argues that as it is intuitively obvious that language is used to do many different things, there is an unfulfilled burden of argument on the formal semanticist to deny our intuitions and privilege the one function.

Now, as a plea for a certain generosity in the theory of language, of a sort afforded by a shift to a validity-theoretic account of linguistic correctness, this seems salutary. Moreover, I have been arguing that we need an account which makes our fluency with a basic communicative repertoire part and parcel of the ability to express oneself linguistically. However, Habermas fails to acknowledge the special role that assertions, and assertional commitments, play in a pragmatics which is essentially discursive - that is, their unique role in practices of giving and asking for reasons. In formal pragmatics, this role emerges in the guise of validity *claims*. Assertional commitments are what are made explicit, challenged and redeemed in processes of argumentation.

What the shift to a notion of validity offers in this regard, is a means of generalising the role of assertional commitments, of showing the different ways in which these all important commitments are raised and challenged in the performance of a

diversity of basic speech act types. Can this motivate a shift away from formal semantics?

That is, does the pragmatic turn urged here motivate an end to semantic theories of meaning, or indeed theories of meaning at all?

It is tempting to think that notions of normativity find a proper home in pragmatics, at least in the anaemic sense of accruing to a theory of purposive action generally, but to deny that such notions spill over, as it were, into a specific concern with language and meaning, and certainly in no sense impacting upon our theoretical aspirations in the study of meaning (this seems characteristic of the Davidsonian approach). Some philosophers (like Brandom, Grice and Strawson) make a case for thinking that a point of contact emerges in making sense of the ('global') question of meaningfulness, of how signs and states get that kind of 'content' in general, but the line between pragmatics and semantics remains sharply drawn.

I have rejected the idea that there can be a sharp line drawn between what I have called the communicative and expressive elements of language, at least in so far as a theory of meaning is charged with reflecting a speaker's linguistic *competence*. A consistent target in this thesis has therefore been conceptions of 'language use' which appear to make intelligible the idea of a language as an expressive resource available independently of speakers' communicative competencies. For instance, this notion comes under fire from Davidson, and I think is just a reworking of the idea, discredited by Wittgenstein, that meaning can be modelled on 'signs awaiting interpretation'. This idea

is one of the grounds of the threat to normativity with which I have been concerned, and I reject it.

However, unlike Habermas, and more like Austin, I am unclear that the pragmatic turn he urges obviously impugns the semantic study of meaning. A more plausible claim for Habermas to make, I would argue, would be to stress that there are different levels of analysis of meaning, and that, once placed in an appropriate framework (such as the Austinian one that he himself develops), the various ‘abstractions’ can be domesticated. I mentioned the ‘cognitivist’ abstraction above. In the context of a theory of language which avails itself of an illocutionary-discursive pragmatics, the pragmatic priority of assertions - in practices of giving and asking for reasons - ceases to be objectionable, but part of a specification of communicative competence.

The ‘semanticist’ abstraction is key, for this is where a Habermasian approach can seem most antagonistic toward traditional conceptions of meaning. A semantic approach to meaning is understood here as an analysis of meaning in terms of the properties of sentences in abstraction from particular contexts of use. This is the study of propositional content, I take it, and which for Habermas is merely one aspect of the broader study of meaning qua linguistic validity. But we need to be really careful about what the notion of content in formal semantics is an abstraction from - that is what ‘particular contexts of use’ is taken to mean. I shall pursue this by looking at how congenial a Habermasian framework might be to a conception of a theory of meaning that is paradigmatically ‘semantic’.

One of the main challenges facing the suggestion that formal pragmatics contributes to a theoretical understanding of linguistic *meaning* is whether the central notion of validity functions as a loose umbrella which mirrors the essentially unordered diversity of linguistic acts (rather like the notion of ‘language game’ is used by some Wittgensteinians), or whether it can function as something like what Dummett calls a ‘key concept’ in the theory of meaning, at least one of the functions of which is to permit a systematic account of speech acts in terms of one central dimension of ‘use’. One obvious suspicion might revolve around the fact that validity as it is used by Habermas is explicitly multidimensional. Some preliminary points need to be made. Firstly, I do not wish uncritically to make Dummett’s meta-theoretical notion of a key concept an absolute desideratum of an analysis of meaning. The trick is to keep within the *spirit* of the law - which I take to concern the provision of some meaning-relevant property which attaches to the constituent parts of language and, furthermore, which impacts upon language use in all its diversity. Habermas, for one, seems aware of these parameters, as evinced not just in his use of Dummett *en route* to his own view, but in his reference to ‘acceptability conditions’ as clear analogues of truth and assertability, the usual suspects for key concepts. Secondly, we do have something of a precedent in Brandom’s use of ‘inference’ as a key concept.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Forgiving the anachronism - it is a precedent in the order of presentation here.

According to Dummett, recall, there are two features of a key concept. Firstly, it embodies commitment to the existence of some one feature of a sentence which determines its meaning. Moreover, given the various aspects of the use of a sentence which must be mastered if we are to ascribe understanding,

the implicit assumption underlying the idea ... is that there must be some uniform pattern of derivation of all the other features of the use of an arbitrary sentence, given its meaning as characterised in terms of the key concept. It is precisely to subserve such a schema of derivation that the distinction between sense and force was introduced: corresponding to each different kind of force will be a different uniform pattern of derivation of the use of a sentence from its sense, considered as determined its truth-conditions.<sup>72</sup>

The second, and related, feature of a key concept is its contribution to an explanation of the *generativity* or *compositionality* of the language - that is, to the explanation of the 'fact' that the meaning of a sentence is determined, in part, by the meanings of the words which compose it. The intuition, quite simply, is that it expresses something important about the notion of meaning that *words* are deemed to have meaning.

If nothing is to be taken as being a key concept, then we are once more without any conception of what the meaning of a word, as opposed to that of a sentence, is to be taken to be.<sup>73</sup>

Furthermore, the virtue of the notion of force, as distinguished from content, is precisely the idea that the 'parts' thus made sense of *make a uniform semantic contribution* to the wholes in which they may figure as the contents of speech acts. These two features of key concepts are of course linked precisely by the idea of a structural 'core' to the theory of

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<sup>72</sup> Dummett, 1973, p.361.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, p.362.

meaning; to the idea of some central meaning-relevant<sup>74</sup> property which attaches to the constituent parts of language.

On the face of it then, ‘validity’ appears to be a poor candidate for a key concept, as understood here. Firstly, it is not a feature of sentences but utterances, which suggests a blurring of precisely the distinction its introduction (qua key concept) is meant to subserve, viz. meaning/force. Moreover, it does not appear to be *one* feature even of utterances, save perhaps in some mystical linguistic equivalent of the Trinity. Actually, the first point here is misleading, since Habermas is keen to stress that his analysis makes use of a ‘standard case’ of ‘propositionally differentiated explicit speech actions’, viz. the explicit performative sentence (e.g. ‘I assert that p’, ‘You are hereby requested to  $\phi$ ’). However, Habermas clearly wants to overcome what he calls the ‘semanticist abstraction’, the view, to reiterate, that meaning can be analysed solely by attending to the properties of sentences abstracted from a context of use. Secondly, if the ‘meaning’ of some arbitrary sentence is not a feature of a stable (context-invariant) structure, we have no resources to explain the generativity of the language (its productivity, learnability, etc.). And the suggestion is that the validity-theoretic approach precisely dispenses with the idea of a *context-invariant core*. We thus seem to be a long way from a traditional theory of meaning.

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<sup>74</sup> In referring to a ‘meaning-relevant property’ instead of a ‘semantic’ property I am attempting to avoid gainsaying the scope of what is meaning-relevant (such as some formal semantic property like the truth predicate). See below.

However, if what is seemingly pernicious about the semanticist abstraction is the way it extrudes a basic communicative competence from an account of linguistic meaning, then I think we ought to reflect again upon McDowell's remarks regarding formal semantics (see chapter 5, #6). Recall that the connection between meaning and truth that the formal semanticist exploits *derives from* the notion of the content of speech acts. McDowell goes on to formulate a model of communicative use in these terms, making use of a notion of speech acts which I claimed was essentially Austinian.

So, within such a framework it is thus possible to characterise a formal position in terms of a notion of meaning standardised to rather than abstracted from a context of possible use. This then relates to claims about 'structure' that inform the intuition behind notions such as compositionality. As such the idea of a *pragmatic* structure relevant to the idea of a key concept itself involves no radical departure. Why should the structural competence appealed to in the idea of a key concept *not* be formal-pragmatic (i.e. that the relevant parts of language extend to cover the *universal* 'parts' of communicative speech)? The idea of the universal validity basis of speech is precisely the idea of a concept which attaches to the constituent parts of illocutionary speech acts. So, it is important to see the validity-theoretic approach as not dispensing with the idea of a context-invariant core, but attempting to widen it to encompass aspects of the 'context-transcendent' pragmatic structure of speech.

Secondly, providing a certain kind of *rationalisation* of speech acts is central to the spirit of a key concept. The idea of rationalisation appealed to here involves commitment to the existence of some central property possessed by all speech acts in terms of which a characterisation of the different features of their use (and thus a typology) is possible. What is distinctive here for the account of meaning according to Dummett, is that a key concept would achieve a *uniform derivation* of all the relevant aspects of the use of a sentence<sup>75</sup> - e.g. what constitutes a justification for asserting it; what are the consequences of accepting it, etc. - that is, in terms of *one* central feature or property; and that, corresponding to each different *kind* of speech act, would be a *different* uniform pattern of derivation. It is the *uniformity of pragmatic structure* that is crucial here; that specific speech acts be seen as pragmatically structured - that is, the various aspects of the use of a sentence are determined - in terms of some central feature of their use.

Habermas offers a rationalisation of speech acts in this vein. Speech acts are distinguished in terms of the thematised validity claims they raise. That is, the illocutionary forces are defined in terms of the validity claims they stress, or raise directly, and which can in turn be traced back to three basic modes - constative, expressive and regulative. Moreover, because validity claims are redeemed discursively (that is, in relation to a potential process of argumentation), validity conditions - of truth, sincerity and normative rightness - are precisely those which determine the *justification* conditions and the consequences of accepting utterances. The notion of validity thus

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<sup>75</sup> Those relevant, that is, to an account of those conditions upon the *understanding* of the language. Of course, one of the express aims of the Austinian framework is to clarify this rather loose constraint.

offers a systematic means of determining those features of the use of utterances relevant to conditions of understanding.

Contrast the Wittgensteinian rejection of a key concept:

[T]he meaning of each sentence is to be explained by a direct characterisation of all the different features of its use; there is no means of deriving all the other features from any one of them. Such an account would have no use for the distinction between sense and force.<sup>76</sup>

Now, it is precisely to avoid the (Wittgensteinian) move to conventionalism - that the meaning-relevant conditions of utterances are to be modelled on the conventional validity of specific 'forms of life' - that Habermas seeks to unearth the context-transcendent presuppositions of speech acts.

Recall that Habermas suggests that the meaning of an utterance be understood in terms of its acceptability conditions:

In a distinct analogy to the basic assumptions of the semantics of truth conditions, I want now to explain understanding an utterance by knowledge of the conditions under which a hearer may accept it. We understand a speech act when we know what makes it acceptable.<sup>77</sup>

This, we have seen, he conceives as a generalisation of Dummett's proposal to explicate meaning in terms of a sentence's assertability conditions - the principal alteration being a commitment to the discursive, intersubjective character of the grounds for (conditions for redeeming or justifying) one's claims, in contrast to the 'monological' character of verification/falsification. This difference is explicitly expressed in the conditions for 'a hearer accepting' as against 'a speaker asserting' a claim. An utterance is acceptable in

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<sup>76</sup> Dummett, *op cit*, p.361.

<sup>77</sup> Habermas, 1984, p.297.

the specific sense that it points to a potential or available fund of *reasons* which could motivate a hearer to accept the (validity) claims it raises, i.e. take a rationally motivated “yes” position. (Another, more familiar, way of expressing this would be to clarify ‘acceptability’ in terms of some set of materially good inferences *authorised* by the speaker’s utterance). It is precisely this connection with a potential process of argumentation<sup>78</sup> that marks his account in terms of acceptability conditions as avoiding the taint of conventionalism, and thus offer a rationalisation of speech acts - that is, offer a context-transcendent account of an utterance’s validity.

Is Habermas proposing a theory of meaning? If we imagine a spectrum of positions vis a vis the theory of meaning<sup>79</sup>, we have at one end the semanticist unconcerned with the communicative employment of expressions. Here the theorist pays least attention to the thought that a theory of meaning should be a theory of understanding (or should connect with speakers actual intentions and practices). At the other end, we have a (perhaps extreme) Wittgensteinian busily doing empirical pragmatics, concerned with an unconstrained notion of pragmatic significance which in effect denies the possibility of a *theory* of meaning at all. According to this view, understanding language - and meaning - is nothing over and above the acknowledgements which make for the performance of practically significant moves within this or that activity (‘form of life’). In between we

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<sup>78</sup> Potential, of course, in the sense that a process of argumentation is an available tribunal in the event of a claim being challenged.

<sup>79</sup> I have in mind here the kind of map of intellectual space that Dummett offers at the end of chapter 10 of his 1973.

have those who, to one degree or another, hold out the possibility of some organising concept or framework which nevertheless impacts upon linguistic behaviour in all its diversity. Here we can place Habermas in company with Austin, Dummett and others. Perhaps uniquely, Habermas has sought to combine insights from both ends of the spectrum.<sup>80</sup>

A mere recapitulation of formal semantics this is not, however. To acknowledge the centrality of assertion in the guise of *validity* claims is not simply to retreat to an autonomous notion of propositional content, therein helping oneself to a notion of linguistic meaning as a communication-independent expressive resource (a linguistic symbol system for the representation of existing or desired states of affairs). It is the manner in which the structural components of speech acts are embedded, by way of universal validity claims, in discursive practices which makes expressions meaningful in the sense I have argued for - that is as a function of our communicative activities.

But any excursion into the question of the precise relation between semantics and pragmatics is really of secondary significance. For Habermas, an analysis of the validity basis of language reveals the essentially *discursive* context of meaning, as it effectively does for Brandom. My main concern in this chapter has been to make the case for a certain contribution to the delineation of a notion of communicative rationality which

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<sup>80</sup> It is important to note in relation to the intellectual possibilities hereabouts that Dummett (ibid, p.362) ventures the possibility of an interpretation of the later Wittgenstein which does not have him rejecting the meta-theory of a key concept, but rather proposing 'consequences' as opposed to grounds for utterances as the locus of such a concept. (On such a view, meaning comes to something like the practical significance of utterance). If such a notion qualifies, I think Habermas's 'acceptability conditions' should get through. I, for one, am convinced that Habermas's introduction of his validity-theoretic account of meaning as giving acceptability conditions of utterances expresses his solidarity with the spirit of a key concept.

speaks directly to our concerns about normativity and meaning. The idea of interpreting the notion of discursive practice in terms of a theory of ‘validity’, rather than simply in terms of inference, enables the fertile concept of the illocutionary to come into view.

Inferentialist philosophers of language like Sellars and Brandom help to domesticate a somewhat ancient, indeed Socratic, thought concerning the explicating function of language; making explicit, that is, conceptual commitments in the form of *claims*; a form, moreover, in which reasons can be given, for and against them. This insight stresses the discursive character of the most basic, content-conferring practices. They are those bound up in processes of argumentation (not merely reasoning, but the challenging and redeeming of *claims*). I have tried to show that this insight is also at work in Habermas’s account of formal pragmatics. Indeed, the central component of that pragmatics is the idea of language as a vehicle for the raising and redeeming of what he calls *validity claims* - and which is really just a generalisation of this inferentialist-Socratic thought but tailored to dimensions of ‘validity’ other than, though including, truth. Recalling Habermas’s debt to the concept of *logos*, a

concept of communicative rationality carries with it connotations based on the central experience of the unconstrained, unifying, consensus-bringing force of argumentative speech, in which different participants overcome their merely subjective views ...owing to the mutuality of rationally motivated conviction...<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Habermas, 1984, p.10.

His central commitment is to the existence of ‘universal validity claims’, those claims to validity/appropriateness/correctness which inhere in the discursive medium itself, viz. communicative speech.

Habermas’s achievement is, I think, to show how the notion of the illocutionary is absolutely central to a pragmatics which is essentially ‘discursive’ (in the sense favoured by Brandom and Habermas, concerning practices of giving and asking for reasons), and thus how it crystallises in a notion of communicative practical rationality which can dispatch our concerns about normativity. I will have more to say about how this is so in the following, concluding chapter.

## 8. Concluding Remarks

The general aim of the thesis has been to understand and develop the role of a notion of normativity as a foundation stone of a proper understanding of language and meaning. In particular I have sought to defend the thesis that normativity is constitutive of the linguistic; a thesis aptly captured by Taylor's remark that to be a language user is 'to be sensitive to irreducible issues of rightness'.<sup>1</sup>

This I have sought to achieve primarily by confronting the challenges a recent, and in my view overwhelmingly plausible, trend in philosophical thinking about mind and meaning poses for an intuitive understanding of their normativity. This trend I have labelled 'the pragmatic turn', which I have sought to clarify in terms of certain core theses owing largely to Wittgenstein and Davidson respectively. These theses enable the formulation of a normativity problematic with which I have concerned myself - accommodating the turn whilst preserving the normativity thesis. This approach has placed two issues at the forefront of my concerns - (i) the relation between meaning and use and (ii) the nature of interpretation. The positive thesis has been to demonstrate how normativity is fundamental to those discursive practices implicated in basic linguistic competence.

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<sup>1</sup> Taylor, 1995, p.84.

Of course, the philosophers I have identified in terms of their contribution to articulating the pragmatic turn are more often associated with accounts of mind and meaning which *retain* normativity in some sense, rather than relinquishing it in the manner of a reductionist naturalism. As such, the thesis has more of the flavour of a concern with the dangers of ‘friendly fire’ than of straight combat, but it is no less pressing for that. Our most cherished thoughts about meaning and agency are, to my mind, more vulnerable to a slow leaching out of this view of ourselves, and that can occur when our backs are turned to face the crudities (the scud missiles, to flog the metaphor) of scientism.

1. In the first, introductory, chapter, I began with outlining the concept of normativity which is appealed to in the context of mind and meaning. This I identified as having two principal aspects or characteristics - what I called the ideal and evaluative senses. The first concerns the contribution something makes to how things ought ideally, rather than how they tend, to go. So, for example, morality is normative in the sense that a moral consciousness involves sensitivity to how one ought to behave. The second concerns something’s contribution to the justifiability of the course of events - thus being normative in virtue of its evaluability. So, for example, understanding behaviour in terms of an agent’s *reasons* involves a commitment to the distinction between good and bad reasons, since reasons recommend, or make warranted, action. These senses are of course related; for example, one *ought* to do what one has a *good* reason to do. Both senses of

normativity are clearly characteristic of human agency, and in particular *rationality*; our responsiveness, that is, to the 'demands of reason'.

Specifically, we saw the centrality of normativity to the distinct kind of intelligibility that is made available by explanatory concepts such as intention, belief and reason - by so-called rationalisations. Equally important was the observation that normativity not only attaches to exercises of rationality, such as to theoretical and practical inferences, but also accrues to the *contents* of inferences - that is to beliefs, concepts and the words which express them. No less than having reasons, our thoughts, concepts and words fall into intelligible patterns having not so much to do with the regularity of their employment but with their correct or appropriate application. These things have satisfaction conditions - in being 'about' the world, our thoughts, concepts and representations are *answerable* to it. In other words normativity was seen to accrue to things in virtue of their intentionality as well as their rationality. This reveals the dual role of appeals to normativity in making sense of meaning and mindedness. [Ultimately, I suggested (though not until the final chapters) that the normativity of *meaning* is best understood primarily in terms of a kind of rationality rather than, as is orthodox, in terms of intentionality. This is expressed in terms of a commitment to an inferentialist/pragmatic as opposed to a representationalist/semantic order of explanation in the theory of language].

I anticipated the main lines of challenge to this basic picture as stemming from something of an internal tension within perspectives that acknowledge normativity - the

anti-intellectualism inaugurated by Wittgenstein's later reflections on meaning and understanding, and the development of Davidson's views on rationality and the nature of interpretation. Before developing the challenges, however, I sought to clarify the role of the notion of normativity in terms of both rationalising explanation (chapter 2) and the notion of meaning (chapter 3).

2. The aim of the second chapter was to defend the constitutive role of normativity in an account of mind by way of a clarification of the Davidsonian thought that a 'constitutive ideal of rationality' governs the deployment of intentional mental concepts. This forms the backbone of an *a priori* argument against certain - reductive - forms of physicalism; that physical and psychological explanations are distinguished by 'disparate commitments'. Although this thesis of mental anomalism is itself not particularly interesting, such extreme forms of reductive physicalism having largely disappeared from the philosophical landscape, the argument remains central to a working out of the distinctive explanatory work made available by concepts of belief, intention and action, and in particular in understanding the relation between rationality and normativity. Specifically, the point of drawing attention to the normativity of these concepts is to make clear the distinctively *ideal-invoking* explanatory work done by them.

This account of the distinctness of the mental, as grounded in normativity, appeared problematic. The explanatory credentials of normative explanation are apparently undermined by a particularism which accrues to concepts such as belief and

intention. This is manifest firstly in what I noted to be the uncodifiability of the considerations of rationality which are brought to bear in interpreting action - that there is often no saying, in general, 'what rationality requires' of agents; nothing, that is, with the explanatory force of a general principle or law. Secondly, it is manifest in the fact that the purpose of rationalising explanation is to reveal action as making sense from the agent's particular perspective.

I thus aimed at a certain demystification of the notion of the 'ideal' of rationality, arguing that the particularism or perspective-relativity of rationalisations poses no threat to the idea of the normativity of the mental, once we acknowledge that attributing reasons is an essentially *critical* activity. I thus argued that the 'ideal'-invoking character is better understood in terms of the *evaluative* dimension of such explanations - in the distinctly critical and reflexive engagement involved in interpreting human behaviour. Attributing reasons involves sensitivity to the distinction between good and bad reasons, a critical distinction made available in virtue of the gap between actual and (a typically notional) ideal performance.

3. The main goal of this chapter was to assess the philosophical impact of a pragmatic turn in our thinking about notions of intentionality, meaning and understanding inspired by Wittgenstein's rule-following considerations; specifically its impact upon an intuitive understanding of their normativity. I began by reiterating a central concern in the putatively normative feature of intentionality. This I sought to characterise in terms of an

intuitive picture of core intentional phenomena which I labelled ‘the naïve view’, the central commitment of which is to the idea that my thoughts, intentions, concepts, commit me to determinate patterns of behaviour, concerning what it is appropriate or correct for me to do, think, say, etc. given those thoughts, intentions and concepts. Facts about what I believe, think, intend, or mean settle matters of what I should or ought to do (whatever I am disposed to do). A more sophisticated gloss would be to stress the ubiquitous feature of intentional phenomena as essentially having normative satisfaction or *correctness* conditions.

How much of this picture can survive the assault on Platonism and its cognates that one finds in the *Philosophical Investigations*? (Platonism, after all, gives graphic expression to the thought of the objectivity of the patterns which constitute doing the right or correct thing). Having traced the overwhelming objections to Platonism and its psychological variants, in particular concerning the regressive character of appeal to self-interpreting rules and the transcendental epistemology it gives rise to, I sought to determine what remains of the notion of normativity by way of examining the nature of this critique. Certain influential readings of Wittgensteinian arguments have them issuing in a rejection of the naïve view in favour of an ersatz view of the origins of norms in regularities of community assessment. These readings place epistemological worries about the manifestability of knowledge of rules and meaning construed in individualistic terms centre stage, and resolve in the proposal that the only epistemically unproblematic grounds for ascription of knowledge of meaning concern conformity to the assessments

or judgements of the community. This constitutes a rejection of the naïve view in as much as the what settles what is or is not correct behaviour cannot be determined independently of the judgements of the community, for example by reference to the contents of minds. I rejected these readings, whether grounded in sceptical or anti-realist premises. The issue of individualism is a red herring - what gets missed is the real target, viz. the view of the normatively inert mind which generates the regress with which Kripke, for one, grapples in vain. Furthermore, the community view which seeks to characterise norms in terms of regularities in community assessments fails to offer any reductive account of norms, that is in terms which do not illicitly appeal to normative notions. Recall, that the notion of a 'community judgement' assumed an ineliminably normative notion of an *authoritative* judgement. The ersatz picture, I concluded, has no grounding in properly Wittgensteinian considerations.

What then is the character of the 'pragmatic turn' Wittgenstein urges? I ended by characterising the view as anti-intellectualist (rather than anti-individualist, or anti-mentalistic). This involves the thought that 'rules' - in some generic sense - should not be regarded as mental items or objects of cognition, as explanations of use or as antecedents of action. However, I resisted the idea that we envisage this *in opposition* to the naïve view. Wittgenstein's positive remarks suggest that seeing behaviour in terms of allegiance to norms, albeit implicit in our practices rather than as Platonic objects of cognition, is fundamental to meaning and intentionality. The shift from 'interpretations' to 'practices, uses, customs, institutions' etc. does not entail a shift away from an interest

in norms intuitively understood, only that there is a form of norm which is not a matter of explicit reasons or justifications.

However, I acknowledged a residual question here, concerning how ‘practice’ *can* constitute obeying a rule. How can meaning remain normative and yet not ‘transcend use’?

4. Having introduced the idea of the normativity of meaning by way of Wittgenstein’s general treatment of intentionality, and the idea of a pragmatic turn, the focus was then turned to language and linguistic meaning. The thesis of linguistic normativity - that language is constitutively normative, that as language users we are distinguished by the normativity of the competencies involved - came into view. I suggested that Davidson’s foundational work in the philosophy of language can seem (mistakenly) to offer an interpretation of this thesis.

Davidson’s philosophies of mind and language form a united front against reductionism, grounded in the thought that the interpretation of human action takes place in a fundamentally normative explanatory space. With respect to language, it is useful to see this in terms of his departure from Quine’s vestigially empiricist (and behaviourist) approach to language. Again, this departure centres upon the role of considerations of rationality in overcoming problems posed by the holistic, seamless character of interpreting linguistic behaviour. So, although building on Quine’s holism, Davidson rejects the thought that there is nevertheless an empirically given way in to interpretation.

Rather, interpretation presupposes *normative* constraints concerning the rationality of interpretees.

My main concern was with the extent to which these constraints, and the notion of interpretative ‘charity’, offer a reading of the thesis of linguistic normativity. I argued that the Davidsonian claim is better understood in terms of a normativity that accrues to *projects of interpretation*, rather than as a thesis about language or meaning per se. This view, I argued, was consonant with the kind of pragmatism Davidson endorses, which stresses that the explanandum of theories of interpretation is successful communication rather than language mastery abstractly conceived; that, meaning is an abstraction from cases of successful communication. Davidson’s philosophy of language resolves in a critique of traditional models of linguistic competence. He rejects an epistemology of language which asserts the priority of a body of shared conventional or rule-based knowledge which is applied in particular cases of interpretation.

However, the pragmatism here is taken by some (Davidson included) to motivate *rejection* of the thesis of linguistic normativity. I contested the inference from the primacy of communication to the view that language and meaning are not normative (or are only extrinsically normative), primarily by arguing that the understanding of communication it assumes offers a non-compulsory view of the relations between the psychological, pragmatic and semantic components of theories of language. I then reiterated the epistemological motivation - familiar from the discussion of the naïve view

in chapter 3 - for the thesis of linguistic normativity; that it makes good the openness, or transparency, of linguistic understanding.

5. Armed with the principal features of the pragmatic turn - the shift to practices and the centrality of communication - I turned in chapter 5 to the matter of developing an appropriate framework for the discussion of communicative language use, framing things in terms of meeting the following desiderata:

- (i) that the theory or framework connects the possession by expressions of linguistic meaning with the communicative intentions and practices of actual speakers;
- (ii) that this connection nevertheless reflects upon speakers' distinctly linguistic competence.

The strategy for motivating the framework I favour made use of a challenge to theorists of language to address themselves to the phenomenon of communication in line with these desiderata. Specifically, the challenge is to develop a notion of the meaningful use of expressions which does not bifurcate this competence into separable expressive and communicative components. I argued that despite the development of bi-partite accounts of meaning, which attempt to offer accounts of language use in terms of a theory of force additional to the formal core theory, formal semanticists fail the challenge. In attempting to meet the first requirement - that of connecting with communicative intentions - the formal semanticist ends up (alongside the Gricean) failing

to satisfy the second. My proposal was to shift to an explicitly Austinian concept of *illocutionary* force and the framework of speech act theory.

I argued that the notion of the illocutionary is the central component of a framework for a theory of linguistic behaviour which meets our desiderata - illocutionary acts being both communicative in their nature and distinctly linguistic. The suggestion was that an account of illocutionary acts provides a model of the force of an utterance, of its use, which applies to speakers *qua* speakers. Consequently, participation in a typical linguistic exchange suffices for communication, without the need for interlocutors to attend to the obtaining of certain extra-linguistic conditions on the performance of speech action (regarding, for example, speakers' higher-order intentions). This, I argued, underwrites an epistemology of language which stresses the demonstrably unreflective character of linguistic understanding.

I ended by showing that a partial defence of formal semantics against the Strawsonian challenge operates precisely by endorsing a concept of speech acts which is essentially Austinian.

6. With a view to motivating the normative-pragmatic approach to meaning that I ultimately pursue, I began this chapter by introducing the general merits of an *inferentialism* in semantics - specifically how it coheres with both a pragmatic articulation of linguistic competence, and an insistence upon its normativity. Introducing the idea of material inference as a key component of an inferentialist strategy with

aspirations to explaining meaning generally, I gave an illustrative outline of a normative pragmatic approach to meaning (owing to Brandom). The general aim of this approach is to provide an account of how norms governing (the *proprieties* of) certain inferential practices institute specifically conceptual and linguistic competencies. Brandom's central claim is that these practices specifically concern interlocutors' keeping score on each other's *assertional* commitments; that is in the process of giving and asking for reasons. This introduces the idea of *discursive* practices as fundamental to the conferral of semantic content. The reason for this stress on assertional commitments appealed to the fact that assertions are uniquely related to giving and asking for reasons (for example, in the light of an assertion being what giving a reason always consists in). Any rejection or modification of this approach is thus in danger of failing to delineate practices which institute specifically *linguistic* competencies.

This priority of assertion however raises the question of how basic, meaning-conferring discursive practices relate to communicative language use more generally. I argued that Brandom misses the opportunity to extend the machinery of a discursive pragmatics to cover basic communicative competence, and which is afforded by shifting to a notion of illocutionary speech action. He fails to deliver on the matter of the contribution that intersubjective processes of assessing *claims* make to the determination of utterance force generally.

7. In the final chapter, I introduced a theory of language which involves a more radical acknowledgement of the need for a pragmatic turn, but which retains some of the merits of inferentialism. This theory, moreover, builds upon the Austinian pragmatic framework already motivated. As with Brandom, the theory makes use of a concept of discursive practical rationality as a cornerstone of the account of language. Unlike Brandom, the theory offers a *critique* of formal semantics and (for Habermas at least) envisages a shift from formal semantics to what he calls formal (or universal) *pragmatics*. My aim in the chapter was, modestly enough, to elaborate the arguments for this shift; give some idea of the character of a Habermasian treatment of meaning; and to ask what the price of a qualified endorsement might be - particularly in the light of the analytic tradition's attempts at making 'meaning' theoretically tractable by means of a distinction between meaning and force. Finally, there and here, I try and relate this discussion to the resolution of the normativity problematic, specifically in terms of the development of a notion of communicative rationality.

I began by discussing the concepts of 'validity' and 'conditions of understanding' in order to clarify the claim that a formal pragmatics is a reconstruction of the validity basis of speech, construed as outlining universal conditions of understanding. This provided an opportunity to locate a Habermasian orientation in relation to traditional approaches to the (philosophical) theory of language. His central concern was identified as being with a pragmatic dimension of the generative competence of speakers.

I then turned to the question of how a concern with certain pragmatic accomplishments might be thought to impinge upon the philosophical concern with meaning and understanding, primarily through a discussion of the relation between the concepts of meaning and validity. This relation was illustrated in terms of its historical roots in Frege, the later Wittgenstein, and then Austin. The space which Habermas seeks to occupy was identified as a theory of speech acts which ‘combines the insights of truth semantics with those of language-game pragmatics’. This involves combining the conceptual link between meaning and judgement (forged by Frege) with a more explicit acknowledgement of the multidimensionality of linguistic validity. The centrality of Austin’s work to the intelligibility of this space was developed, particularly in terms of the fertile concept of the illocutionary act. For Habermas this notion is key to the demarcation of what he calls ‘communicative action’. The basic theoretical mechanics of Habermas’s account of illocutionary acts in terms of the raising and redeeming of universal validity claims was laid out, and his central notion of the meaning of an utterance as given by its acceptability conditions.

What the Habermasian approach offers, I argued, was a notion of communicative speech action which speaks directly to our overall concern with linguistic normativity; and yet which is the centrepiece of a pragmatics which relates appropriately to the philosophical concern with meaning.

Taking the latter first, I defended the view that despite offering a critique of formal semantics - in terms of various illegitimate ‘abstractions’<sup>2</sup> - the Habermasian approach does retain something of the spirit of a key concept (see chapter 7, #8), central as that is to the idea of a philosophical theory of meaning. That is, in the concept of validity we are offered an organising feature or property relevant to the determination of correct language use which both attaches to the constituent parts of language but which nevertheless impacts upon linguistic behaviour in all its diversity. However, I argued that some work was required to domesticate the validity theoretic approach, and this required acknowledging the pragmatic priority of assertions, something Habermas eschews as a ‘cognitivist abstraction’. A discursive pragmatics is distinguished by the evaluative practices of assessing claims - that is, in processes of *argumentation* or ‘deontic scorekeeping’ and one has to acknowledge the special role of *assertional* commitments in such practices. However, I argued that this was not simply a recapitulation of formal semantics. I suggested that by conceiving the validity theoretic approach as a *generalisation* of the this role, Habermas would be able to domesticate the valid concerns regarding these ‘abstractions’. The pragmatic priority of assertions - in the guise of validity claims - need not recapitulate the semantic autonomy of the propositional.

This debate about the meta-theory of meaning was, however, of only supporting significance in allaying fears that a notion of formal pragmatics simply recapitulates

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<sup>2</sup> Recall, the semanticist abstraction (that meaning is to be explained in terms of the properties of sentences in abstraction from any context of use); the cognitivist abstraction (that meaning attaches in the first instance to the assertoric function of sentences); and the objectivist abstraction (that meaning is to be explained independently of knowledge of justification conditions).

traditional (and I have claimed, problematic) divisions of labour in the theory of language. The main purpose of appeal to the Habermasian theory was in its contribution to the delineation of a special notion of communicative rationality - concerning the validity basis of speech action - and which I claimed offered a fruitful basis for tackling the normativity problem - that of reconciling a pragmatic turn with the thesis of linguistic normativity. One of the principal motivations for wanting a defence of this thesis I identified as being epistemological - that we can have largely direct and unproblematic access to the meanings of each other's words; and that a certain 'bond' between interlocutors explains why linguistic understanding is characteristically unreflective, rather than a matter of divination or what Wittgenstein called 'interpretation'. So, a fundamental desideratum of any account of language is that it underwrite this epistemology; and one of the main claims defended here was that this can be achieved in clarifying the nature of the co-ordinating effect of illocutionary speech action.

The account I favour is charged with reconciling the thesis that language is constitutively normative with what I have claimed is an overwhelmingly plausible pragmatic turn in our thinking about language and meaning.

One aspect of such a reconciliation will be grounded in Wittgenstein's anti-intellectualist reflections, on the shift to the model of norms as implicit in practice. Secondly, the account needs to acknowledge the primacy of communication in understanding a properly linguistic competence. (These being the principal ingredients of

the pragmatic turn). Thirdly, we need to be sure that the normativity the account credits to certain communicative competencies constitutes a defence of the thesis of linguistic normativity.

It is my view that a Habermasian (validity-theoretic) approach offers a robust defence of the thesis that language is constitutively normative consistent with the pragmatic reorientation as understood here. Commitment to the normativity thesis is expressed in the internal relation between language and validity - specifically in the fact that validity claims inhere in language. This concerns the argument that the co-ordinating effect of participation in illocutionary speech action involves the *rational* motivation of acceptance of the claims they raise. That is, illocutionary speech acts - which are distinctly *linguistic* acts - uniquely raise *validity* claims (those which presuppose their redemption through the speaker's ability to mobilise *reasons*). Normativity is thus a distinguishing characteristic of the process of the discursive redemption of validity claims (argumentation being a paradigm case of what Brandom calls 'deontic scorekeeping'. See chapter 6, #4).

Since the practices basic to language are *discursive* ones<sup>3</sup>, that is concern the evaluation of implicitly raised claims, there is a commitment to their communicative articulation (a commitment shared by Brandom). However, additionally for the Habermasian approach, there is the appeal to an illocutionary notion of speech action, which I have argued demonstrates the special relevance of those basic 'scorekeeping'

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<sup>3</sup> Rather than merely inferential.

practices to language use generally, and thus offers a more persuasive rendering of the claim that they distinguish the *linguistic* (in all its diversity).

Of course, the argument for the validity basis of speech, which asserts that linguistic competence rests upon a kind of critical rationality, appears to present a thesis which, *prima facie*, is at odds with the epistemology of language I have held at a premium - that understanding language is an unreflective capacity.

Does this rationalism conflict with the unreflective nature of linguistic behaviour, or indeed with Wittgenstein's insistence on the anti-intellectualist, implicit character of norms? Isn't the role of 'reasons' in Habermas in clarifying the meaning (validity) of an utterance a falsification of this powerful corrective to the perils of Platonism?

It is important to be clear on what commitments there are regarding the role of reasons here. Firstly, I suggested in chapter 3 that we see the moral of Wittgenstein's anti-intellectualism as primarily inveighing against that chimerical capacity of 'interpretations' to breathe normative life into essentially inert mental items, and to connect them to determinate courses of action. But this is just as unconvincing a view of 'having reasons' as it is of intending to act, or any other kind of intentional activity.

Secondly, clearly meaningful speech does not turn upon a speaker's attempts to actually redeem the validity claims that her utterances raise, nor indeed upon these claims being raised explicitly. This occurs only when a challenge to them is issued. Furthermore, actual speech need not conform to a *structure* which explicitly reveals what these claims are (i.e. explicit, propositionally differentiated, illocutionary speech acts), although

understanding requires one acknowledge the validity claim, if only by default. Validity claims (and their redemption) are implicit in successful speech action. Most claims thus do not require explicit justification.

So, successful speech action does not require that participants actually have reasons for the claims their utterances raise. This would indeed overburden a normal linguistic exchange in a manner I have objected to (see chapter 5). The validity basis of speech points only to the availability of a *procedure* by which disputed claims may be settled, and thus to knowledge of the *kind* of considerations which could motivate agreement:

We understand a speech act when we are acquainted with the kind of reasons that a speaker could cite in order to convince a hearer that he (the speaker) is entitled under the given circumstances to claim validity for his utterance.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, it seems to me that the background of discursive practices, that is of argumentation, actually *explains* why linguistic understanding is largely unreflective, in an analogous way to appeals to convention (cf. Austin). Conventions exist to standardise behaviour, and in so doing screen off the idiosyncrasies and quirks of individual psychology (hence the role of conventions in contemporary versions of Gricean intentionalism). Analogously, recall the reciprocity of the illocutionary which permits the screening off of what I called perlocutionary noise. The role of reasons in the redemption of validity claims *facilitates* a ‘face-value’ epistemology, precisely in that the availability of the background *levels the field of communication*. That is, it allows us to take each

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<sup>4</sup> Habermas, 1992b, p.78.

other at face value, safe in the knowledge that a mechanism exists for making explicit the commitments and entitlements of interlocutors.

To summarise, I have sought in this thesis to overcome a kind of scepticism in contemporary thinking towards the idea that language is in any interesting sense normative. Such scepticism has seemed to be the natural result of a kind of pragmatism which we can capture, loosely, in the slogan that ‘meaning is use’; that meaning, if it is to be publicly accessible, cannot be a matter of some behaviour’s conformity to an ulterior standard, but must be fully manifested in actual cases of linguistic practice.

However, I have resisted any slide from this pragmatism to the claim that language and meaning are thereby not normative. My motivation for this has been not merely to preserve a thesis with considerable historical resonance, indispensable perhaps to a cherished view of ourselves as especially dignified by our linguistic capabilities. More significantly, I have argued (somewhat transcendently) that a robust thesis of linguistic normativity is required as a means of *underwriting* precisely that epistemology which I would argue (alongside sceptic and anti-realist) is non-negotiable; that our normal linguistic encounters give us direct and unproblematic access to the meanings of each other’s words (and by implication thoughts). My strategy has then been to develop a notion of language use, of linguistic practice, which does not bifurcate meaning from the communicative use of expressions (and thus does not represent meaning as a matter of the prior internalisation of items ‘awaiting interpretation’); and which, in developing the

idea of the special communicative bond between interlocutors, facilitated by involvement in basic speech action, reveals the essential normativity of the competencies involved.

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