

## On Meaning As Use and the Inscrutability of Reference

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### ABSTRACT

In this paper I argue that there are two strands at work in Wittgenstein's rejection of the idea of the "Logically proper name" and its associated doctrine, ostensive definition. The first strand is a certain holism presupposed by both intentions to mean (*Meinen*) and meaning (*Bedeutung*). The second strand is the idea that the way a word or sentence is used – its point or role in the lives of its users – is internal to meaning, and not some additional or optional feature. These strands are paralleled in Davidson's doctrine of the inscrutability of reference by the idea that reference is a theoretical posit needed to apply a holistic theory of meaning, and that assignments of reference are also determined holistically, as is the role of causality.

Bertrand Russell thought there had to be logically proper names. Otherwise, language could not hook onto the world. But what we ordinarily call names are not "logically proper", he further thought, so some OTHER words must be. For ordinary names do not denote directly, whereas a true name must. There must be words which denote directly, "which are only significant because there is something that they mean" (MSOR, p. 387), he thought, "if language is to have any relation to fact" (MSOR, p. 387). Indeed, according to Russell, "The necessity for such words is made obvious by the process of ostensive definition", since there are many kinds of words (he cites colour terms as an example) which can only be understood on the basis of experience. At some point description must fail; at just that point we need directly denoting words in order for our words to have meaning (be understood?).

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I do not intend to analyse Russell's thought in this paper, nor will I discuss logically proper names in much detail. What I want to do is discuss the approaches and insights of two great philosophers who have written since Russell as they deal with what I take to be the phenomenon Russell's views on names were meant to address. The phenomenon I have in mind is that of what it is for words to have meaning - words, not sentences - and how this relates to denotation or reference. The philosophers I have in mind are Donald Davidson and Ludwig Wittgenstein (in his later work). Their approaches are in many respects quite different, but on this particular issue it seems to me they share some deep insights worth going on about. In particular, I will go on about what is shared between Wittgenstein's dark doctrine that meaning is use and Davidson's (inherited from Quine) sceptical-sounding sayings about the inscrutability of reference. It is not, I think, a case of Wittgenstein having influenced Davidson. In fact, although Wittgenstein's identification of meaning and use is widely quoted and widely influential (as a citation from authority, sadly, as much as a critically evaluated "definition" or doctrine), it has not always been well understood, and certainly not by Davidson. (For an example, see BBM, p. 143). But that Davidson and Wittgenstein, starting from such different assumptions and pursuing such different immediate objectives, should end up in, I take it, almost the same place, is a matter worth commenting upon, especially since Wittgenstein and Davidson are often taken to be at odds about meaning and how we are to account for it.

## I

There are, I think, several things that Wittgenstein means us to appreciate through his linking/identifying meaning and use. Austin, somewhat crankily perhaps, thought that ". . . use' is a hopelesly ambiguous or wide word, just as is the word meaning', which it has become customary to deride" (Austin, HTDTWW, p. 100). Perhaps that is true. But Wittgenstein is wonderfully adept at supplying contextual clues as to what he means by "use" in a given instance. Yet such clues never spare us "the trouble of thinking" (PI, introduction, p. viii). Our problem is keeping track of and accomodating all of them. The use of "use" that I will be primarily concerned with occurs at # 43 of *Philosophical Investigations*:

For a LARGE class of cases - though not for all - in which we employ the word "meaning" it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language. And the MEANING of a name is sometimes explained by pointing to its BEARER.

Here "meaning" translates the German "Bedeutung", not "Sinn" (which Wittgenstein's English translator's also render as "meaning" in most contexts). The concern is

with what words mean or refer to, not with what sentences mean. Wittgenstein says similar things about the meaning of sentences, as well (see # 20, for instance), and the meanings of words and sentences are complexly related.

In the sections around # 43 Wittgenstein is discussing the idea of logically proper names -the idea that the meaning of a word is the object for which it stands. The general outlines of his critique of this idea are well known. He points out absurdities the doctrine leads to if applied to what we usually call names, as in # 40 where he points out (what Russell already knew) that if the meaning of a name really were its bearer it would make no sense to say "Mr. N.N. is dead". This point hardly refutes the idea that SOME words must denote directly, of course. So an advocate of the idea that words are names need not find this an "absurdity" at all.

To get further with the critique of logically proper names we have to consider the phrase "use in the language" and how such "use" is supposed to do the work of determining the *Bedeutung* (reference) of a word. What is Wittgenstein contrasting such a "use" with? There are, I think, two threads in Wittgenstein's thought that are brought together here. The first is an appreciation of considerations which lead to insight into the holistic nature of meaning, while the second thread emphasizes the need for practice in determining meaning. The two threads are, in important ways, mutually complementary.

Shortly before #43 (on page 18) Wittgenstein has stationed a remark about ostension and intention which concludes as follows:

Can I say "bububu" and mean "If it doesn't rain I shall go for a walk"? - It is only in a language that I can mean something by something. This shews clearly that the grammar of "to mean" is not like that of the expression "to imagine" and the like.

Here again we have the idea of meaning only being possible "in a language" ("meaning" here translates "meinen" - to intend - the point being to draw the common necessary conditions for referring and intending ones words to mean). I will take it, to start with, that Wittgenstein means by "language" just what we ordinarily mean, examples being Castillian Spanish, Mandarin Chinese, English, and Hindi. Support for this reading comes, primarily, from #97, where Wittgenstein complains against the philosophical tendency to refine ordinary concepts into "super-concepts" like proposition, truth, etc. Then, he says that "... if the words language', experience', world', have a use, it must be as humble a one as that of the words table', lamp', door'" (PI, I, #97). But more on this shortly. Moreover, while Wittgenstein sometimes speaks of "language" without the definite article -meaning, I think, a whole realm of activity and practice- in both instances quoted such an article is present. What, then, is the connection between meaning (reference) and being "in a language"? For can't we make up new languages? Can't we make up languages for special purposes (such as science), the terms and syntax of which never have the breadth of use across a community of

diverse interests that a natural language does? Are these terms somehow senseless? Hardly. I take it that Wittgenstein is far too subtle a thinker to have thought such a thing or to have failed to notice such an implication. Nor can the point be that being "in a language" in our usual sense determines reference, for words in "special" languages can clearly refer. More basically, how can "use in the language" play the role of establishing a relation between language and fact thought so essential (and rightly) by Russell? This, I take it, is the basic issue.

The connections between meaning and being in a language are, as I said, Twofold. Wittgenstein held, I think, that Frege's contextual dictum that a word only has a meaning in the context of a sentence expressed, in perhaps a misbegotten way (see PR, #12), an important insight. This insight is holistic in nature, the idea being that it is sentences, including one word ones, that are USABLE. A name, just by itself, is just a name:

For naming and describing do not stand on the same level: naming is a preparation for *description*. Naming is so far not a move in the language game -any more than putting a piece on the board is a move in chess. We may say: NOTHING has so far been done, when a thing has been named. It has not even GOT a name except in the language game. This was what Frege meant too, when he said that a word had meaning only as part of a sentence.

(PI, I, #49).

Here the very idea of something being "a name" is seen as an abstraction from actual and possible uses of a term in sentences. And it is such uses which show us the "grammar" of a term or concept. Independently of such uses of, say, arithmetic terms we do not have the concept of, say, a number. What that word does is "shew the post a which we station the word" (PI, I, #29), indeed, a whole class of words such as "one" and "twenty-three". But can the same be said for the idea of a word or name in general? For unless we grasp something of a words potential role independently of knowledge of complex sentences, the thought goes, how could we ever BECOME speakers/interpreters at all? For in order to grasp the point of language the child must somehow grasp what it is that people are talking about (referring to) in her surroundings. This seems a precondition of going on to "do things with words".

Before taking up this concern directly I would like to say more about this first "thread in the thought of #43 that I have identified in the passages I have quoted. It is, obviously, holistic in nature. And the holism implied is a condition of both words and sentences having a meaning. This is why we cannot mean "If it doesn't rain ..." by "Bububu"; for the sense of sentences, too, are given in a pattern of sentences. If we CAN locate "bububu" in such a pattern, by detailing its grammar or inferential relations to other sentences, then we can mean by it "If it doesn't rain ...", but we will be meaning it "in a language".

The idea that an utterance's meaning is derivable from some mental act which

bestows the meaning is being combatted in this passage about what it is to mean something. The need for enough regularity of use to make plain the role of an utterance or a word in a pattern of utterances is being emphasized. Structure cannot be WILLED into a sentence, but must be made evident through use of the parts over time and in other patterns. The "parts" of a sentence are only parts, as it were, considered in their roles in sentences. And this "role" tells us what a word means.

Consider an example (adapted from a paper by Akeel Bilgrami: MHU). A physicist uses the term "mass", as does the adolescent being initiated into physics in school. The term applies to tables and tomatoes, and in so applying it the physicist and the child mean the same thing by "mass". But the physicist applies the term to macroscopic and microscopic objects via complex calculations as well. The holist claims that the child "has not got a full understanding of the term mass" (Bilgrami, p. 118) until and unless she grasps its "full theoretical role" (Ibid): what "mass" means is given by its role in a pattern of sentences, any change in this role being to some degree a change in meaning, and appreciation of this role being what understanding another's utterances consists in. (Which is not to deny that such understanding can be a matter of degree.) The meaning of "mass" is not settled independently of, or prior to, this role. This may seem obvious for such a theoretical term, but the point is, I think, general. The meaning of ANY term is only settled in light of such a pattern of sentences.

Here one may balk. Isn't what is at issue REFERENCE, not sense? How can reference, the relation between a thing -a real, existing particular in the world- and a word be determined by a role in a pattern? What hooks the pattern onto reality? There is, I think, the germ of an important insight behind this worry. Ubridled holism is not what Wittgenstein means to suggest. The second aspect of "use in a language" -the second "thread" I spoke of earlier- is meant to lead us to see what constrains holism, what puts us in touch with the world.

Consider the builders of Investigations #2ff and BrB #1. Here we have unstructured utterances, there being in the builders' practice only one-word sentences. Has their term "Slab" the same meaning as our term "Slab"? No, says Wittgenstein, if "having a different meaning" means that "in our language there are usages of the word" which differ from theirs. We (can) say "That is a big slab of granite", they don't (can't?) say this. So even though we might utter "Slab!" just as they would, i.e. expressing the desire "that he should bring me a slab" (PI, I, #19), we say it, as it were, in contrast to other possible utterances involving "Slab", but they do not.

And we are inclined to say that all that is really relevant is that these contrasts should exist in the system of language which he is using, and that they need not in any sense be present in his mind when he utters his sentence. (BrB, #1)

These "contrasts", moreover, call in question the idea that "Slab!" refers in any straightforward way, especially one so straightforward as "direct denotation (referen-

ce)". IF "Slab!" were a name we might expect reference to the degree that names are the sort of thing built to refer, but it is not at all clear in the light of our considerations that their utterance (one-word sentence) "Slab!" is a name precisely because it is a sentence. This is why Wittgenstein discusses at some length whether or not their sentence "Slab!" is short for -really means- "Bring me a slab!". WE can say this, but they do not have the resources to say this, nor have they made the necessary distinctions (between command and name). For in the "translation" "Bring me a slab!" the term "slab" plays a role different from the role it plays in the builders utterances ("role" here referring to its "post" in sentences).

Wittgenstein thought, I think, that it would be to misrepresent the builders to suggest that their word-sentence "Slab!" means, in general, what the English word "Slab" means. For him, "to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life" (PI, I, #19). This involves appreciation of the characteristic roles, in another sense of that term, that a word (or sentence) plays in the live of speakers of that tongue. Modern English, for example, contains many words, and its speakers say and do many things, which people in Shakespeare's day had not dreamt of. If we want to say what a given word means, we often do so by citing TYPICAL uses, uses which indicate something of the interests which speakers of that language have or had. When a lexicographer identifies a "use" of a term for her dictionary, such a "use" is, of course, a role in a pattern of sentences -the holism required by the considerations discussed above - but it also a characteristic role in the actions of a community. Here "role" refers to a range of usual illocutions (and, perhaps, perlocutions) which constitute what has "caught on" of that terms actual uses in the past history of that community. That any term may, on occasion, be used for just about any purpose should not obscure this fact, for appreciation of the role a term has played in non-linguistic surroundings is, in general, necessary for understanding what it means or refers to.

Nonetheless, and at first paradoxically, it can turn out that the builders' sentence "Slab!" means just what the English sentence "Slab!" does in the sense in which that sentence of English might well correctly translate that sentence of the builders. This is so because contemporary English speakers SOMETIMES engage in activities very like those the builders engage in -close enough to be identified for local purposes. The role of their sentence, on a given occasion, may be pretty much the role of one English sentence on an occasion. But, again, "role" here is not what in the Tractatus Wittgenstein called a "logico-syntactical employment" (TLP, 3.327), a position in a pattern of other utterances, so much as it is a position in non-linguistic purposes (to get, via an understanding of the meaning of the utterance, the assistant to bring a slab). Indeed, the builders' speech may well lack sufficient structure to warrant calling it a language, yet "Slab!" might mean "Slab!" on an occasion.

This is the other sense in which meaning is use for Wittgenstein. Not that meaning can be reduced to or derived from the non-linguistic purposes of speakers (see PI, I, #498). Rather, such purposes are necessary for there to be meanings in general (not every pattern has meaning, only one's employed - or employable - in certain ways).

Engaging in and observing such purposes is an essential aspect of how we learn to talk. The contexts in which such purposes are pursued show us the POINT of many words and sentences, but they are also essential to meaning. For only in the context of the responses of the assistants does "Slab!" have the meaning it does. Meanings, in our ordinary dictionary sense, are established by use in typical contexts over time. Further, only a term that could play such a role -that could be used to do things with words in Austin's senses - has sense (in one good sense of "sense").

The meaning of a given term, then, cannot be, contrary to what some philosophers have thought, given independently of or prior to its role in a pattern of actual and possible utterances. This is the lesson of holism. But what constrains what is possible here is, according to Wittgenstein, actual, finite, practice to date. For we understand such things to arise out of historically prepared ground. At any given time, those speaking a tongue will be disposed to say only certain things, play only certain games, pursue only certain ends, a fact about them and their language which any grasping or translating of their meanings must take into account. (I will return to this point.) This does not mean that it is somehow "impossible" that they might say or do other things, only that such sayings and doings will generally involve new linguistic resources and new or differently conceived activities and purposes.

As noted above, however, this goes only for those terms and practices which have fairly broad social employment or special status (including specialized ones of the sort Putnam had in mind in speaking of the division of linguistic labour). There are always terms that are created for special, short-term uses which we would not say are part of "the language". In my adolescence my group of friends called someone we thought foolish or unlikeable a "bodo". But the term has not, thankfully, caught on sufficiently to make it into any dictionary. Hence, "a LARGE class of cases", but not all. It does not follow from holism that the meaning a word has must be meaning-in-a-language where "language" means French, Urdu, Portugese, etc.; it DOES follow that a word must be located in a pattern of sentences, whether all that is of this pattern be sufficiently established to be "English", or whether it involves fleetingly (or enduringly) idiosyncratic elements that never get widely emulated. And it is the way such sentences (or a subset of them) are used in our nonlinguistic goings on that determines reference. This includes acts such as pointings while uttering a particular sound, as Russell thought it must. But the KIND of thing pointed to is given only by grammar (the role in a pattern of sentences), and this even if we are naturally predisposed to learn kinds of words in certain orders (object names before determinables, for instance). Such predispositions, while forming the basis for any logic, are not part of our logic itself.

## II

Davidson has articulated the thesis of the inscrutability of reference as follows:

... there is no way to tell what the singular terms of a language refer to, or what its predicates are true of, at least no way to tell from the totality of behavioural evidence, actual and potential, and such evidence is all that matters to questions of meaning and communication. (IR, p. 227)

This SOUNDS sceptical, as if Davidson thinks that somehow we can never know what it is we are referring to. But, while Quine, who first stated this problem, may have thought that such ignorance threatens the possibility of communication, scepticism is not Davidson's point. And certainly not scepticism about communication. Rather, Davidson assumes that we communicate via words. He treats as evidence for what our utterances mean all the available (actual and potential) utterances and actions of a speaker. Given this, how can we decode meanings, including the reference of terms? Private acts or events are beside the point.

The semantic features of language are public features. What no one can, in the nature of the case, figure out from the totality of relevant evidence cannot be part of meaning. (IR, p. 235)

It would seem to follow that reference is not part of meaning if it cannot be determined on the basis of any evidence. In a sense this is true for Davidson, but putting matters this way is also misleading in a way I hope to bring out in what follows.

Much impressed by our ability to immediately understand the meanings of heretofore unheard utterances, Davidson finds it fruitful to describe this ability in terms of our possession of a theory of meaning adequate to such a task. We do not "know" such a theory in any propositional sense; rather, only by articulating such a theory can our abilities be described in any detail (NDE, p. 438). The details of such theories I leave aside here. What matters is that such theories are in the position of any other empirical theory, requiring justification on the basis of evidence. A theory of the sort Davidson has in mind is a theory for a language. So the empirical question becomes "Is this person speaking this language?: or "Does the evidence warrant application of this theory (ascription of this language) to this person?". If it does, her words mean what the theory shows them to mean.

Supposing that there is merit in this enterprise, where does reference come in? One of the virtues of expressing our abilities in terms of the possession of such theories is that the construction of such a theory will show us much about the structure of language. Indeed, since a theory of the sort Davidson recommends (a Tarski-style truth theory) isolates primitives and rules of syntactic combination as part of its job, such a theory will show us how the meaning of a sentence depends upon the meanings of its parts. It will do this by revealing the syntactic and structural relations between sentences, as well as their inferential relations. The meaning of both a sentence and of a term in a sentence (a word), then, will be its role in such a pattern of (actual and potential) sentences.



But this last claim moves us too quickly. For the issue of inscrutability arises at the level of the meanings of the parts. How are these determined? It would be natural to assume that they could be established by some such means as Russell envisioned -say, direct ostension. Indeed, if causal accounts of reference have anything to them, the causes of an utterance play a role in determining what it is about. But the idea here is that one can determine the meanings of the parts of an utterance (the words) by some means, THEN specify the rules of combination. This is surely what Russell had in mind in speaking of direct denotation, and this much is needed if antecedent holistic influences are not to influence meaning. In this way the meaning of a sentence would be seen to be dependent upon the meanings of its parts.

Davidson calls any approach that would first determine the meanings of the parts of an utterance (the words) and then go on to account for the meaning of the sentence versions of the "building-block theory". He thinks such theories are hopeless, trying to "move too far too fast" (RWR, p. 225). An appreciation of the considerations discussed earlier supporting a large degree of holism should lead us to abandon, he thinks, such theories. This does not, however, mean abandoning a central role for causality in determining reference, merely understanding how holistic considerations and causal ones relate. On this aspect of reference his thought, while in fundamental sympathy with Wittgenstein's, is more explicit.

For Davidson, the goal is to construct a theory of meaning. Because the criterion for whether or not a certain theory is right is that it describe not only what a person HAS said, but also what she would go on to say, there is room for any number of theories equally adequate to the finite evidence but varying with respect to unspoken utterances (SP, pp. 5-6). The evidence cannot settle this, cannot choose among such theories. But why should it, says Davidson? And why should its failure to worry us? Provided such theories are equally adequate to the evidence, they are just alternative ways of stating the facts (BBM, p. 154, RWR, p. 224). New evidence will weed out some contenders, but if one theory is adequate to the evidence (a more or less proposition at the best of times), then so will others. The reference we assign to words is to be seen, on Davidson's view, as so much theoretical fallout from an adequate theory of meaning (itself part of a larger project of attributing beliefs, desires, and intentions):

... we compensate for the paucity of evidence concerning the meanings of individual sentences not by trying to produce evidence for the meanings of words but by considering the evidence for a theory of the language to which the sentence belongs. Words and one way or another of connecting them with objects are constructs we need to implement the theory. (RWR, p. 225)

Nonetheless,

... what is invariant as between different acceptable theories of truth is meaning. The meaning (interpretation) of a sentence is given by assigning the sentence a semantic location in the pattern of sentences that comprise the language. Different theories of truth may assign different truth conditions to the same sentence ... while the theories are (nearly enough) in agreement on the roles of the sentence in the language. (RWR, p. 225)

This means that the theory is testable only as a whole, not word word nor even sentence by sentence. Truth conditions are assigned to particular sentences in the light of all the evidence, and reference relations between words and things are so assigned as well. We do not verify the reference of a particular term by itself; rather, we treat a person as referring to a given thing because that best accounts for all we know about her. And we change what we take it her to have been referring to in the light of new relevant evidence. The sentences are still dependent upon the meanings of their parts, but such meanings are determined holistically, in the light of all the evidence, rather than in advance and one at a time. So the dependence is mutual, not one way.

Again, a sympathizer with Russell's point about the need for some terms to denote directly may begin to get edgy at this point. For surely this pattern of sentences is not, as it were, freefloating. Surely it must tie onto the world. And this is right, the question being "What sort of tie would suffice?". Whereas Wittgenstein speaks of the "tie" by speaking of the role the sentence and its parts play in our non-linguistic goings-on, Davidson here speaks directly of one aspect of that role, causality.

Causality comes in, and must come in, if we are to implement such theories (use them to communicate), but it does more than this. For causality "plays an indispensable role in determining the content of what we say and believe" (CTTK, p. 317). In relatively basic cases an interpreter, if he is to succeed in interpreting the utterances of a speaker, must take what he takes to be the causes of a belief (here the same as a sentence held true) to what that belief is about. As Davidson puts it,

Communication begins where causes converge: your utterance means what mine does if belief in its truth is systematically caused by the same events and objects. (CTTK, p. 318)

If someone NEVER spoke about those things proximate to her - if we were to interpret someone as always speaking about something else -what would she be talking about? It is hard to see. But then we couldn't interpret her as talking about something ELSE. If you don't know what someone is talking about you can't know what their utterances mean. For Davidson, as for Wittgenstein, the meaning of an utterance is only given via the connections between utterances and other actions (see RWR, p. 220). A theory of meaning abstracts from these in order to explain them, but requires causal connections to do its work when applied to utterances. Indeed,

There are no words, or concepts tied to words, that are not to be understood and interpreted, directly or indirectly, in terms of causal relations between people and the world (and, of course, the relations among words and other words, concepts and other concepts). (MS, p. 19)

But even though we must give special weight to causes, especially in simple cases, the same holistic considerations apply. Only in the light of ALL the evidence is a particular ascription justified or rejected. The canons of such interpretation are immensely complex, of course, and there is much to be said by way of hermeneutic rules of thumb. But we cannot expect to simplify them, even with respect to deciding what a word refers to. So Russell was right, on Davidson's view, to insist that some of our "fundamental words" must have a direct relation to fact, but was wrong in approaching this relation atomistically via the notion of direct denotation. Or, if you prefer, there is direct denotation, but only in a language. Not only is naming "not a move in the language-game", but naming as PREPARATION for such moves is not direct denotation, denotation being such a move.

I have presented Wittgenstein as emphasizing how actual, finite practice limits what counts as a possible utterance at a given time. For Davidson, we must be prepared to interpret a vast number of a speaker's utterances if we are to understand any. We can think of this as having

... a grasp of the speaker's unrealized dispositions to perform other speech acts. Indeed, we may think of having, or knowing, a language as a single, highly structured, and very complex disposition of the speaker. We describe the disposition by specifying what the speaker would mean by uttering any of a large number of sentences under specified conditions. (MM, p. 255)

But only certain utterances will count as possible here -those involving the same primitives and allowed for by the same syntactic rules. This does not rule out invention in either of these areas, just as Wittgenstein does not think that previous practice limits what we can do in terms of saying or doing new things. But for Davidson any dispositions to be so inventive are precisely not what is grasped when meanings are, hence they are to be distinguished from dispositions to speak covered by evidence to date. The question what someone does mean or would have meant in uttering certain words (that they ARE words being only a provisional guess, subject to interpretation) is to be distinguished, then, from questions such as whether or not Mozart could have written *Body and Soul*, and also questions of what is "possible" for the builders to invent by way of new resources. For no clear sense can be given to the task of specifying the resources Mozart might have had or needed to do so, whereas Davidson has shown us how to give such sense to questions of what a speaker's words mean. He takes, more explicitly than Wittgenstein, finite practice to date to limit "possible"

utterances only in the sense that that practice has manifested/created only certain resources (words, syntactic operations, causal connections to things). To add new resources would be to speak a different language in his technical sense. For Wittgenstein a "language" is Japanese or Estonian, and the boundaries of these things are far less precise than Davidson's abstract objects.

In light of Davidson's story we can see two distinct strands in Wittgenstein's idea that imagining or understanding a language is imagining or understanding a form of life. The first strand picks out the history of a term with respect to its physical environs, if you will. Here causality is central, that word covering also all of our means for individuating items with pointings, glances, holdings up, etc. etc. Wittgenstein makes much of how we teach children language. He does this for a variety of reasons, one sometimes being to get us to appreciate the nature of such connections (although he would not, I think, be happy with merely calling them "causal"). The other strand picks out the broader social history of a term or expression, what a people do or do not use a particular term to express. (I recently had a discussion with a loved one about whether I was failing to be "perceptive" in not noticing a change in my environs worthy of comment, or whether I was not being "attentive". For some purposes these terms might well be synonyms, but not for others.) When we are speaking of natural languages, an idea which Wittgenstein refuses to "make more precise", it distorts matters to draw a firm line here between pragmatic and semantic matters. (How much it is a matter of the meaning of "perceptive" and how much that that term might mislead can be given no precise sense in Wittgenstein's categories: what matters is recognizing the facts.)

What, then, of inscrutability? It is not really a problem, but a phenomenon. That, restricting ourselves to determining what someone's utterances mean in Davidson's clarified, narrow sense there is empirical slack sufficient that differing assignments of words to things are equally adequate to the evidence is a threat to nothing important. Different decisions regarding reference (what someone is talking about) will, of course, affect the truth of that person's utterances and the truth conditions of all sentences involving that term. But this does not lead to contradiction provided, as Davidson has argued we must, we compensate by adjusting our understanding of that person's beliefs, desires, and intentions. Two different assignments of truth conditions ascribe to a person possession of different languages. Since the criterion for settling what language, among possible alternatives, is being spoken is ultimately counterfactual in nature, however, we can never restrict ourselves to "one right answer". All we can do is rule out the wrong ones. The only sense in which we "can't tell what the singular terms of language refer to" (IR, p. 227) is that in which we could eliminate all room for rational disagreement. Such disagreement goes beyond the matter of putting things in different ways; for this latter sort of variance there is much room. But for the former sort there is less once assignment of beliefs, desires, and intentions comes into play. As Davidson puts it,

Given a comprehensive account of belief, desire, intention, and the like, it is an empirical question what language a person speaks. And so we have, at last, a rather surprising way of making significant sense of the question what a word refers to. (IR, p. 240).

### III

Both Wittgenstein and Davidson reject the idea that the meanings (*Bedeutung*) of particular words can be settled or established prior to or independently of the logico-grammatical role such words play in a pattern of sentential relations. This issue, of what words refer to, is not to be confused with that of what a speaker refers to. We are usually justified in taking someone pointing at a car and saying "voiture" to mean to direct our attention to an automobile. The evidence whether or not we are right in assigning reference to automobiles to "voiture" is what else they go on to say about and involving "voitures". In they turn out to have many strange beliefs about cars we will begin to wonder if we were right in taking that to be the reference of their word, even if we still think that they were referring to that car. We cannot, however, generalize or turn into laws the multitude of things which affect how we decide what to conclude.

Wittgenstein says nothing about the inscrutability of reference per se. He does not mean by "language" what Davidson means, hence he has no "problem" of how to decide among empirically equivalent languages. But neither does Davidson have a "problem", I have argued. Inscrutability of reference identifies, in the mode of speech appropriate to epistemic matters, the fact that direct denotation is a chimera. But both Davidson and Wittgenstein are in sympathy with part of the motivation behind the search for direct denotation. Or, better, both take into account or pay attention to what it is we go on, in actual cases, in deciding questions of reference. Both would, I think, agree with Russell that there must be a relation between we say and "fact" for our practice of speech to be possible; what they deny, among other things, is that this can be understood at the level of individual words except in abstraction from their role in sentences. Davidson would speak of causality being central in relatively basic cases (as distinct from "fundamental" ones), while Wittgenstein speaks only of the "use" we make of a term, both in a pattern of sentences and in the role those sentences play in our complex goings on. These amount to, I have claimed, pretty much the same thing, by which I mean that the role these consideration play in the thought of these two philosophers is pretty much the same seen in the broad context of describing and understanding language. This despite the fact that Wittgenstein blurs (intentionally) the line between semantics and pragmatics, while Davidson depends upon and cleaves to a clear distinction here. For the "role" I have in mind is one in the larger enterprise of coming to have a descriptive overview (*Übersicht*) of the "conceptual geography" of our talk of "language" (see NBDT, p. 88 for some evidence that this is Davidson's goal).

Wittgenstein "blurs the line between semantics and pragmatics" because he came to see, via a consideration of the logic of colour words, that some inferential relations cannot be accommodated in a truth-functional theory of meaning. A full notion of meaning cannot be legitimately abstracted from contexts of use. Davidson agrees (LFAS, pp. 105-6, 137-144), holding fast to the distinction nonetheless. For while "nothing strictly constitutes a theory of meaning" (RTF, p. 179) and we must, to understand our actual practice, erase "the boundary between knowing a language and knowing our way around the world generally" (NDE, p. 446), he has found a way to make clearer than before how it is that the meaning of a sentence depends upon the meaning of its parts. To this degree his story complements and supplements Wittgenstein's by arriving at the same place by a different route; we know the countryside even better.

In closing, I would like to mention another element of both Davidson's and Wittgenstein's thought germane to the issue of reference (and meaning more broadly) which I have not discussed in this paper but which is worthy of detailed treatment. I refer to what Wittgenstein sometimes calls "primitive responses" and what Davidson calls "similarity responses" (see SP and MTE). We could not come to talk with each other at all if we did not share much here, and the complex patterns of adjustment and interaction we engage in with each other in light of each other's responses have much to do with how our sounds come to be words, and with what our words are about. If we are to find order and pattern in another's use of sounds we must share much in terms of such responses: if you do not respond to what I take to be (or can learn to see as) like stimuli in ways I can see as like (i.e. regularly), we cannot get started in the business of speech. For only so can I identify, to put the issue in Davidson's terms, the causes of your utterances. And only by associating your utterances with KINDS of objects and events can I take you to be using words. To "name" every particular in the world might be to use signs, but such signs would not be language. But that is the topic for another paper.

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