THE PROBLEM OF MEANING IN LINGUISTIC PHILOSOPHY

Bennison GRAY

The key passage in *Philosophical Investigations* is probably paragraph 43 where Wittgenstein defines "meaning" as the use of a word in the language. No doubt one could, after a detailed analysis, demonstrate that when 'properly interpreted' *Philosophical Investigations* presents a much more consistent and coherent use theory of meaning than we usually give Wittgenstein credit for. But our major concern ought to be more with the nature of language and language meaning than with what any one philosopher has had to say about it, especially when he himself admits the obvious fact that his work is really only an "album" of "sketches." Paragraph 43 has proven to be immensely provocative, however, perhaps for the very reason that it raises more questions than it, or the work as a whole, answers. I should like to analyze paragraph 43, not primarily to support or refute Wittgenstein, but because the questions raised by such an analysis bring out rather neatly three sets of crucial distinctions: *la langue* and *la parole,* use and usage, the definition of words and the interpretation of statements. I hope to show that accepting the distinction between language and utterance (*la langue* and *la parole*) obliges us also to distinguish between the meaning of a word and the meaning of a statement ([1]) — that the difference between language and utterance is also the difference between the two kinds of meaning. This should result in a considerable clarification of the function — and the limitation — of meaning as a philosophical concept.

I. *La langue* and *La parole*

43. Man kann für eine *grosse* Klasse von Fällen der Benützung des Wortes "Bedeutung" — wenn auch nicht für *alle* Fälle

seiner Benützung — dieses Wort so erklären: Die Bedeutung eines Wortes ist sein Gebrauch in der Sprache.

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. ([2])

1. Why is a "large" class specified and not *all* instances of the use of the word "meaning" ? Does "*wenn auch*" mean that all instances *are not* covered or that all instances *may not* be covered ? If all instances are not covered, what kind of instances are not covered ? Do they form another large class, a small class, or several classes ?

2. Is the change from "*Benützung*" to "*Gebrauch*" significant ? Should they be translated "use" and "usage" respectively ?

3. Why, after promising to *define* the word "meaning," does Wittgenstein *explain* what is meant by "the meaning of a word" ? Does this imply that all meaning can be reduced to the meaning of words ? Does it imply that the "large class of instances" mentioned above is all the instances of language (as opposed to extra-linguistic) meaning ?

4. Does "*Sprache*" refer to *la langue* or to *la parole* ?

Since the publication of *Philosophical Investigations*, the distinctions under question two (use and usage) and four (*la langue and la parole*) have been increasingly recognized as crucial. ([3]) What we do with a word is the use to which we put it. This use may be conventional or unconventional. From the conventional uses of a word we can abstract a pattern of usage — the more or less agreed upon rules for using it. Patterns of usage change because uses of a word change, and words change because fashions and needs do. Even today, however, when dictionaries are much more descriptive than was Dr. Johnson's, a word is used far more diversely than any pattern or patterns of usage can indicate. Metaphoric uses of a word, for instance, can never be subsumed under a pattern

of usage until they cease to be metaphoric. And when a use ceases to be regarded as metaphoric it can be used again as another metaphor. The philosopher or the lexicologist who attempts to pin words down to a pattern of usage or the layman who simply wants to become more proficient or fashionable in his use of words is always one step behind changing uses. The task of the lexicologist and the lexicographer, and in a somewhat different way the philosopher too, is to sort out the uses of words and attempt to describe the rules (or usage) that govern or explain these uses. The *use* of words is infinite; the generalizations that can be made about how they are used, or ought to be used, is a question of *usage*. What makes meaningful communication possible is not mere use but use in accord with usage.

The distinction between language and utterances was originally Saussure's. (4) *La langue* is the social phenomenon of a single language; it is not a concrete thing but an abstract system, which is based upon all the utterances or instances of speech that are recognized, by virtue of their meaningfulness, as belonging to that particular language. This class, or family, or system, is composed of all past utterances and includes each new instance of speech. An utterance may be unorthodox or substandard, but it is still a part of *la langue* if it is similar enough to past instances to be recognized and to a greater or less degree to be understood. These instances of speech are the finite reality; the language of which these instances are members is a system, an abstraction, a class, a universal. Just as there is no thing "horse" aside from the instances of similar creatures termed "horses," so there is no thing "language" aside from instances of speech. These instances Saussure refers to as *la parole*; they are space-time events, but they do not exist as *la parole* unless they are linguistically meaningful, that is, unless they are recognized as belonging to or being instances of *la langue*. These instances of speech (which are grouped together as the class or system *la langue*) can be analyzed into component elements — like phonemes, morphemes, words, sentence patterns, etc. — but these elements are also abstractions. Conversely, the abstrac-

tion *la langue* can be analyzed into these same component abstractions (this is what dictionaries and grammars do), but still all that exists is particular utterances or *la parole*. A word listed in a dictionary is not the same thing as that 'same' word uttered (written or spoken) by a particular speaker in a particular space-time context. The meaning or dictionary definition of the word "careful" is not the same as the meaning of "Careful!" in the context of a speech act.

Our task here is to analyze this difference and to explain how Wittgenstein mistakenly 'defined' the word "meaning" as the use of words (question 3). If we can do this, we can also answer question 1 (which is actually a corollary of 3) and say for what class of words "the meaning of a word is" *not* "its use in language." But before venturing further it is necessary to clarify two concepts in order to distinguish the kind of study a philosopher makes in analyzing usage from the kind a scientist makes in classifying things. Because there is no agreed upon terminology to make these distinctions, I should like to set up my own very tentative one for the remainder of this paper. My use of "term" and "word" is not important; the distinctions that can be made with them are. "Token" and "type" are often used for similar distinctions, but not always with definitions based on an understanding of *la langue* and *la parole*.

A term is that most obvious and distinguishable component of an instance of speech that we ordinarily call a word; it is *la parole*. It is a space-time event, either a sound or a mark. When spoken it is phonetically unique. All instances of similar terms, which may vary slightly in pronounciation or shape but which function identically, are grouped together as a word — *la langue*. A word is a class of phonemically identical terms. Although, as we have noted, "word' is usually employed for both, this distinction is needed to maintain the clear separation between, for instance, the *word* "careful" as it occurs in the dictionary and the *term* "Careful!" as a specific utterance. Of course every actual occurrence of or reference to a word is also an instance of speech, and thus also a term. In the dictionary "careful" is a word, but it is also a term because in

every individual copy of the dictionary it is a particular instance of word use — in this case written. This does not, however, hinder us from recognizing when a word is only being used and when it is also being *referred to* qua word.

The word "careful" is a universal; it is the label of a class, the members of which are the individual instances of the word. All classes are universals. But the meaning of a word (i.e. its definition) is not to be equated with the function of a class label. Rather this meaning is a statement of its pattern or patterns of usage. The definition of some words (e.g. "horse" but not "is") includes among other functions, this class function, but there are only a relatively few scientific or technical concepts (e.g. "paramecium") that have no other use than as a class label. It is important to note that these words, and only these words, are universals in two ways. Like all words, they group together as a class phonemically identical terms. But in addition, they group together as another class some other similar phenomena (e.g. instances of the creatures we call paramecia).

The word "is" (*la langue*) is a universal because it groups together all specific instances of the term (*la parole*). "Paramecium" is the label of a class made up of specific one-celled creatures. It is also a word that groups together all the specific occurrences of the term "paramecium." Like "paramecium," "horse" is both a class label and a word, but unlike "paramecium" its definition is not coextensive with the definition of the class. The word "horse" has many uses other than to denote or refer to a specific kind of four-legged creature. Even abridged dictionaries list more than a dozen different meanings of "horse."

The lexicographer defines words, and he does so by analyzing terms, describing their uses, and abstracting from these uses a pattern or patterns of usage. The scientist too begins by analyzing particulars, not particular terms, however, but particular phenomena of other sorts. And instead of abstracting patterns of usage, he abstracts a class based on a common characteristic or a pattern of characteristics. Only then does he reach for a label to distinguish his class, and then he often coins one from

Latin or Greek rather than pick a word already in use and run the risk of having his usage of the word confused with similar, but different, popular usages. The scientist here is defining a class and applying a label; he is not defining a word. Only in a few instances, e.g. "paramecium," is the definition of a word the same thing as, and nothing more than, the definition of a class: a statement of the defining features of the class of things called "paramecium" is the same as a statement of the pattern of usage of the word "paramecium."

Whatever usage sanctions is part of the meaning of a word, whether or not there is a common characteristic or 'core' of meaning. Language is not simply the use of precisely defined and limited class labels, and not even the scientist with his more rigorous terminology based on class definition can stabilize the meanings of words. Symbolic logicians and generative grammarians wish that the language were amenable to this kind of absolute ordering, but it simply is not. ([5]) The philosopher can make a study of various uses of a word and abstract from the most frequent or most precise uses a pattern of usage. Then he can advocate his particular definition as the most reasonable, the most precise, the least confusing, the most needed, etc. This half descriptive and half prescriptive approach, which is perhaps best characterized as argumentative, need not be viewed as the philosopher's only task in order to be acknowledged as an important one. One of the purposes of this paper is to make just such a study of the word "meaning." But equally important is the attempt to demonstrate the inadequacy of that kind of philosophical analysis that equates meaning and use. Insofar as it makes any sense at all to label as a problem something that by its very nature marks the limits of human understanding, the 'problem' of meaning cannot be 'solved' by a thinly veiled positivism that seeks to explain one thing simply by equating it with another. On the other hand, however, there is neither solution nor clarification in the kind of analysis that seeks as an end in itself to emphasize the different and irreconcilable ways that "meaning" has in fact been used. ([6]) As Perelman has convincingly argued, positivism and scepticism alike suffer from the same

fruitless Cartesian absolutism. ([7]) The rational task, which is presumably the task of philosophy no less than the other disciplines, is to develop and test principles of unity. No special knowledge or skill is needed to point out diversity.

II. Use and Usage

We cannot equate the meaning of language with the use of words simply on the strength of Wittgenstein's exhortation: "Don't ask for the meaning; ask for the use," or because we can fruitfully distinguish between the concepts of "use" and "usage." J. N. Findlay is correct in pointing out that "use" as a philosophical concept which purports to be a more precise interpretation of "meaning" "is of all things the most obscure, the most veiled in philosophical mists, the most remote from detailed determination or application, in the wide range of philosophical concepts." ([8])

Utterances are meaningful; we can make them ourselves and understand those of others. How or why they are meaningful is not a philosophical question and probably not a physiological or psychological one either. What the philosopher can hope to do is to explain what must necessarily be involved in the conscious process of understanding statements. What he must recognize first, however, is that we can make and understand meaningful utterances (i.e. statements) without either knowing what "meaning" is or being able to state *the* meaning of a statement that is meaningful. We can use and understand words without knowing either what is meant by "definition" or what are *the* definitions of the words we use. And we can use language without being able to state what we mean by "language" and what by "utterance." These concepts are abstractions; they are theoretical and philosophical. Hopefully, the more adequately we can explain these concepts, the better able we will be to speak, understand, teach, and learn, but we must recognize that these considerations arise out of the phenomenon of language (what Saussure calls *le langage*) and are not prerequisites for it. We do not necessarily know what we mean by "use," "usage," "language," "speech,"

"meaning," "definition," simply because we do use language. Findlay's analysis is very much to the point here:

> The reason why it is absurd to tell us *not* to attend to the meaning of expressions but to concentrate on their use, is perfectly simple: it is that the notion of use, as it ordinarily exists and is used, presupposes the notion of meaning (in its central and paradigmatic sense), and that it cannot therefore be used to elucidate the latter, much less replace or to do duty for it (p. 233).

Indeed, the same criticism can be made against the concept of "family resemblances" as having solved the problem of universals and thus by implication the problem of meaning. ([9]) Members of a family may not possess any common physical or temperamental characteristics by virtue of which they constitute a class, but to refer to them as a family in the first place presupposes some kind of unity simply in order for communication to take place. The notion of family resemblances only pushes the problem one step back. It assumes the existence of a universal in order to demonstrate that its members actually have nothing in common. It assumes that universals are meaningful because they are used yet denies that their meaningfulness can be explained except by the empty equation: meaning is use. And as far as "family" is concerned, there is an obvious defining feature that all members of a family possess and that no non-members possess — that is, common ancestry or parentage. A woman 'marries into' a family not her own; an illegitimate child may be 'legitimized.' These concepts are meaningful only because we have a basic notion of what constitutes a family — documented biological kinship. Even when the law resorts to legal fictions to maintain class integrity, it is demonstrating what is at the heart of universals — reasoned principles of inclusion and exclusion. ([10]) Principles may change, but the necessity for principles is eternal.

What then *do* we mean by the meaning of an utterance ? The usual order of procedure is to offer first an analysis of words

and then of words used in utterances. But, as we have seen, utterances are the first order of existence. Only after we understand something about utterances can we abstract from them recurring elements and group them together in classes. Words, sentence patterns, grammatical conventions, help us to understand more readily, but they are artificially contrived phenomena, and their meaning is not the meaning of an instance of speech. The meaning of a statement is the way that it is or should be interpreted in an extra-linguistic context by a hearer or reader. It is not the way the words are used; it is not the intention of the speaker; it is not what the statement reveals about the speaker.

We can interpret meaning as "use" in two ways, both of which, however, are unsatisfactory. First, we can mean by "use" the way the words and grammatical patterns are used in constructing the utterance. That is, we can say how the elements of *la langue* make up an instance of *la parole*. This interpretation does more than simply claim that a certain combination of elements is meaningful: it claims that these elements and this particular arrangement of them *is* the meaning. But this involves us in a kind of mind-body dilemma in which we are never told how it is we get from the external physical reality of an act of speech (which we can analyze as being composed of conventional elements like words) to the significance of the utterance. Nor does it avoid the charge of begging the question, since what we want to know is the nature of this significance and not a synonym for it. The nature of the meaningfulness of language (and/or of universals) is ultimately unknowable". Yet if we do choose to make an abstract analysis of a statement and to call that analysis its *meaning*, we should be able to justify calling it "meaning" instead of simply "lexical and syntactical analysis." How, we must ask, does this analysis differ from what the linguist does with purported scientific completeness, while eschewing the concept of meaning? It is enough for him that language is meaningful, for he is dealing with *la langue* — not with *la parole*.

A second possible interpretation of meaning as use is that

meaning is the way a speaker uses an utterance — that is, for what purpose he intends it. This interpretation involves us, however, with the very nebulous concept of the speaker's intention. ([12]) If by "intention" we mean something in the mind of the speaker apart from what he says, we are faced with the problem of how we are to know this intention without at least psychoanalyzing him. To be sure, everything a person says and does is symptomatic of him in some way — one psychologist has even found a statistical correlation between the ratio of verbs and adjectives and the emotional stability of a person ([13]) — but *the* meaning of an utterance is something different from what it tells us about the speaker. If we say that the utterance means what the speaker intends, we must be able to explain the difference between the two and to tell how it is that they are related. We must be able to say how we can know this intention except from the utterance itself, for if the utterance is the only or major source of this intention, our explanation is merely the shuffling of words: Meaning is intention and intention is what is meant.

The listener can analyze how a statement makes use of the words and syntactical elements that compose it, and also how the statement as a whole is intended or used by the speaker. But the first is something less than the meaning of a statement and the second is something more. In neither case does the concept "use" help us explain the meaning of a statement. The first must presuppose that a statement is meaningful before the meaningful elements that compose it can be analyzed. It tells us the components of the statement, but it does not tell us what we mean by the *meaning* of the statement or how it is we go about finding it. The seconds does not deal with the meaning of a *statement* but with the interpretation of an *act of utterance.* A statement can be interpreted as symptomatic of its speaker, but not before the statement itself is understood. The meaning of "Water flows down hill' is the same whether spoken by a geology professor in the classroom or a madman in his cell. In each case, what an interpretation of the act of utterance will reveal about the speaker is based upon the meaning of the statement but is different from it. ([14])

III. Definition and Interpretation

The meaning of a word, that is, its definition, is the patterns or rules of usage that seem to govern the majority of its uses. Words as elements of *la langue* are like any of the other abstractions of *la langue*, such as phonemes, morphemes, intonation and sentence patterns, etc. We do not ordinarily confuse these other abstractions with the meaning of a statement because they have only recently been isolated, because we do not apply the word "meaning" to them, and because we are much more conscious of them as abstractions than we are of words as abstractions. Quite obviously a sentence pattern, for instance, does not exist apart from particular sentences. There is no dictionary of sentence patterns on every desk, and we do not (unless we are an over-zealous linguist) erroneously believe that instances of speech are constructed *out of* these patterns. With words, however, we consistently fail to distinguish between a word in or as an utterance (i.e. a term) and a word as a universal or class of such terms. This is complicated not only by the fact that we have no terminology to make this distinction, but also by the fact that the same word — "meaning" — is used indiscriminately in analyzing both. There is, however, a word — "definition" — that also, and more accurately, refers to the pattern of usage of words as abstractions. There is not even one word for the patterns of usage of the other elements of *la langue*. Like words, they exist as abstractions and they represent features that recur in similar ways in an infinite number of particular statements, but unlike, words, these patterns of usage have no names, not "meaning" or "definition." Whatever our terminological difficulties, however, we cannot maintain that statements are meaningful in the same way that words, phonemes, morphemes and sentence patterns are meaningful.

The definition of a word differs from the interpretation of a statement in that a definition is an abstraction that is applicable to all, or nearly all, occurrences of the word, while an interpretation is applicable to no, or few, other statements. Words(as words and not as terms) are isolated from any par-

ticular speech context, while statements always occur in, and are meaningful because they occur in, a particular context. The elements of this context vary according to the nature of the statement. Sometimes they include the speaker in the act of making the utterance, i.e. the act of utterance, but not always. When they do, the statement can be classified as personal; otherwise it is impersonal. There is a limit, however, to how 'personal' we can get in interpreting a statement in the context of an act of utterance. Information about the identity of the speaker is sometimes needed to complete the meaning of a statement, and this can come only from the act of utterance. The further we go, however, from this kind of verifiable information, the less relevant to the meaning of a statement becomes an interpretation of the act of utterance.

In *How to do Things with Words* J. L. Austin has extensively analyzed one kind of personal utterance, the "performative." ([15]) Part of the meaning of a performative utterance is who says it. In a wedding ceremony if the ring bearer instead of the bridegroom blurts out "I do," the meaning of this statement is different than if the bridegroom had said it; that is, we *interpret* it differently. The interpretation of a statement in an extra-linguistic context is its meaning. The ring bearer's statement "I do" does not mean that he takes the bride to be his lawful wedded wife and that the saying "I do" is his part in a ritual that establishes his legal and religious status as a married man with all the corresponding rights, privileges, and duties. His "I do" only means that he does say "I do" and that he is definitely not the appropriate person to say this and that the ritual is being upset. Austin calls this an infelicity. "I do" were the right words, spoken at the right place at the right time, but by the wrong person. To know the meaning of the statement "I do" in this case we must know who should say it, why, and who did in fact say it (i.e. to whom the "I" refers).

Most personal utterances, however, are not performatives. The meaning of any statement that refers to the speaker with a pronoun that does not have an antecedent must derive from an act of utterance. If I say "I live in Hawaii," this does not

mean that someone lives in Hawaii, nor does it mean that B. Gray lives in Hawaii. It means that B. Gray claims that he lives in Hawaii. If someone hears me through the wall saying "I live in Hawaii," the statement will be *meaningful* for him, but unless he recognizes my voice he cannot say what *the meaning* of the statement is. He must know about the context of the statement, and in this case the context must include the act of utterance. It is a personal statement because it refers to the speaker with a pronoun: the meaning of all such statements must include the identity of the speaker.

The meaning of "I live in Hawaii" must, in addition, however, be interpreted in a larger context than simply an act of utterance. To understand the meaning of a proposition that refers to a particular space-time event we must know what this event is and whether or not the statement is empirically verifiable. A proposition of this type must be interpreted within the context of the act of utterance. The context of "I live in Hawaii" includes this empirical information and also information about the act of utterance sufficient to identify the "I." Both statements are facts, and usually the 'factuality' of a specific proposition is the essence of its meaning.

The meaning of a general proposition (a scientific law or hypothesis, a prediction, a generalization) also is usually a matter of its truth or falsity. But because this kind of proposition has no specific space-time event for a referent, the context for interpreting it is likely to be rather elaborate. Matters of authority, statistics, logical validity, representative instances, implied conditions and qualifications, are more important here than for specific propositions. The meaning of scientific laws and hypotheses often includes a submerged mass of theory and experimental data. All this is a part of the context within which the general proposition must be interpreted if we seek to state its meaning. Understandably, then, we are usually content to accept such statements as meaningful rather than to demand of ourselves or others *the* meaning. It is difficult enough to provide on demand the meaning of just one of the words we have used in a statement. Perhaps it is best to admit

that for the meaning of most statements an *adequate* interpretation is possible, but not a complete one.

In giving the meaning of propositions we assume that our interpreter is a kind of hypothetically qualified listener who can, for instance, go instantaneously to the records and check, or who can make an on-the-spot experiment or observation and give an empirical verification within the bounds of contemporary (and not supernatural) knowledge. No one has to abstract the meaning of any kind of statement for the statement to be meaningful. But if an interpretation of the meaning is given, it is judged by the strictest standards. Within given restrictions of length or extent of interpretation, only the most adequate interpretation is the meaning. Of course for any real-life interpreter the meaning is likely to vary, depending on his prior knowledge and his ability to verify the claim himself. But just as we cannot make the meaning of a statement depend on the abilities or limitations of the speaker, we cannot make it depend on the abilities or limitations of any listener. "B. Gray lives in Hawaii" is still a statement of fact even though the person to whom it is spoken does not know English or has no means of verifying the proposition.

IV. Conclusion

The meaning is not the function, or use, or intention, or referent. It is a far vaguer and more pragmatic affair than any of these. ([16]) *The meaning of a statement is the interpretation that we work out by analyzing the statement in the largest context needed to make sense out of the obvious fact that the statement does make sense.* This is what Austin did with performatives, and while most utterances are not performatives, he was correct when he suggested that all utterances must be interpreted in a context. This interpretation I have termed the meaning. The word "meaning" itself is hardly necessary, but if we choose to use it, I do not know what more than this we could mean by it. To offer more is to equate meaning with some other thing (use, symbol, linguistic elements, behavior, etc.) and thus to claim in effect still another solution to the mind-body dilemma.

I am not maintaining that the meaning of a statement consists of *everything* than can be said about it. What is linguistically conventional in an utterance is part of *la langue*, and the study of this is the special province of the linguist (or grammarian), who deliberately avoids, or at least minimizes considerations of the utterance in an extra-linguistic context. He is concerned with abstracting and analyzing the elements of language and their use in constructing statements, not with interpreting the meaning of specific statements. Of course one can study language only with specific instances of speech as examples. Yet there is a difference between analyzing a statement primarily in terms of grammatical elements and interpreting it in an extra-linguistic context. There is some overlap here, and probably more than the formal linguist cares to admit, but the two endeavors are still distinguishable. The linguist, like the cryptanalyst, with little more than the assumption that an utterance is meaningful, can distinguish elements in a language that he does not know. On the other hand, the average native speaker knows practically nothing about the formal grammatical elements of his language, but he can still do an adequate job of speaking and understanding.

Linguistic philosophy needs to make use of linguistics but not to duplicate it. It needs to be concerned not so much with the elements of a language, which are in fact used to make meaningful statements, as with the nature of this meaningfulness and the meaning of particular statements. The linguistic philosopher wants to know, not simply what usage is, but how it can or should be clarified. If the linguist is a student of *formal* grammar, the linguistic philosopher could claim to be a student of *semantic* grammar. The linguist is content to distinguish formal elements in a system and to catalog their different patterns of occurrence; for him these elements and these occurrences are the meaning. The philosopher, however, feels obliged to explain usage in the very terms by which it is understood. "Use" if it is applicable to this endeavor at all must be defined not merely in terms of miscellaneous occurrence but of understanding. And understanding is necessarily qualitative — it is not proved but argued for; it is a matter of

degree rather than either/or. Where there is no understanding, there is no language; but where there is understanding, it can always be improved — if for no other reason than that interpretation can always be expanded.

To conclude our analysis, let us test this conception of language meaning by applying it to a widely belabored problem of contemporary philosophy — nonsense statements. Nonsense statements are something like a missing link between the abstracted lexical and syntactical conventions of *la langue* and the concrete instances of *la parole*, and as such they provide good examples of degrees of understanding. ([17])

There are two different kinds of nonsense statements. Since we have defined a statement as a meaningful utterance, we might call the first of these a nonsense utterance. "Consanguinity drinks procrastination" contains several obvious elements that we recognize as belonging to the English language: three recognizable words, conventional sentence pattern of subject-verb-object, initial capital letter and concluding period. Yet above and beyond these elements of *la langue* the utterance has no meaning. Someone might be able to read something into it, but unless there is a measure of agreement these personal interpretations cannot pass as either the meaning or an approximation of it. Any other singular noun, third person singular verb, and another singular noun in this order would be as meaningful. If it made more sense it would do so because it had some significance as a statement. Consanguinity is not the sort of thing that drinks anything, and procrastination is never drunk. This sentence could not be meaningful in any context, even literary. We can work out the meaning of an unconventional statement as we work out the unknown element in algebra. We do this, for instance, when we interpret a metaphor. But we cannot find two unknowns in a four-term equation. That is, in language we cannot interpret a meaning from an utterance that is meaningful only because of its linguistic elements. Making sense, or having a meaning, presupposes meaningful linguistic elements, but it is itself an extra-linguistic consideration.

"The present king of France is bald" and "Purple quadratic

equations go to race-meetings" are not nonsense utterances but nonsense statements. That is, they are meaningful, at least to some extent, above and beyond the abstract conventions of the language. There are present kings, some of whom are indeed bald; France had had bald kings; and until a century ago France was a monarchy. The problem, of course, is that there is now no king of France; therefore, statements about the condition of his scalp are irrelevant. This fact certainly renders the statement less meaningful than "The present president of France is bald," but it does not render it meaningless in the way that a nonsense utterance is. In fact, the above interpretation *is* the meaning. What we can and cannot say about this statement in the context of French history, present-day France, and the nature of baldness, is the interpretation of the statement in an extra-linguistic context. Only if we could say nothing positive about the utterance except that the words were meaningful (i.e. that they could be defined) and that they formed a recognizable syntactical pattern could we say that the utterance made no sense as a statement. Race-meetings certainly do exist and they are the sort of thing to which a person, or horse, or thing can go. But quadratic equations are not the sort of thing that can go anywhere, nor are there such things as colored equations. Here again the statement is not very meaningful, but it is obviously significant above and beyond the conventions of the language.

There are degrees of meaningfulness among statements that are meaningful. A false proposition is likely to be more meaningful than a misconceived one, and a true proposition more meaningful than either. But there is no question of degree between a statement (nonsense or otherwise) and a nonsense utterance. An utterance that is completely misconceived as a statement ("Consanguinity drinks pocrastination") makes no sense. A statement that, though misconceived, has some elements that are significant above and beyond the conventions of the language is to some degree meaningful as a statement, even if we label it nonsense.

Another problem to which this conception of meaning might fruitfully be applied is that of value statements. In many

instances value judgments are similar to nonsense statements. They are *not*, I hasten to add, nonsense utterances; they are not in all instances like nonsense statements; and by "similar" I do no mean identical with. I do not presume to venture in where more learned minds have faltered, nor am I advocating an, or the, emotive theory of value judgments. I am merely saying that the meaning of an evaluative proposition, unlike many other propositions, is derived in large part from the *act* of utterance. If forced to label this conception, we might call it a rhetorical theory of value judgments. That is, we must include in our interpretation: who said it, to whom it was said, for what purpose, what ethical and religious presuppositions are involved, how sincere the speaker is, what his motives are. How much more 'personal' must this interpretation be than, for instance, that of "I live in Hawaii" where the act of utterance is necessary to reveal *only* the identity of the speaker.

Perhaps we could set up something of a semantic hierarchy, with nonsense utterances, nonsense statements, value judgments, personal propositions, and impersonal propositions. The first is meaningless as a statement and doomed to this fate. The second is misconceived but meaningful to an extent as a statement and may be construed to have a metaphoric meaning in a specially contrived context. Also the third is meaningful as a statement, but when isolated from the act of utterance, it does not provide sufficient information for abstracting *the* meaning. The fourth has a precise meaning but this cannot be stated until the speaker is identified by the act of utterance. The fifth contains all we need to abstract its meaning because it identifies the external referent that constitutes the context. Complete interpretation of meaning is therefore not dependent on a knowledge of the act of utterance. Nevertheless, it too is dependent on knowledge of an extra-linguistic context — in this case that which is sufficient to determine the truth or falsity of the reference. Knowing whether or not B. Gray does in fact live in Hawaii makes the assertion more meaningful than simply understanding the claim.

The distinction between *la langue* and *la parole* seems to me

the *sine qua non* of any analysis of language, whether philosophical or linguistic. Indeed, linguistic science is based upon this distinction, although individual linguists sometimes forget it. The progress of the discipline in the past half century is partially, at least, a result of the limiting of its subject, as Saussure advised, to *la langue*. The analysis of meaning and meanings, however, is the philosopher's task; he studies not just *la langue* but also *la parole*. The linguist's concern is not with meaning as interpretation but with meaning (in so far as he uses the concept at all) as recurring elements and their formal patterning. The philosopher, on the other hand, analyzes not linguistic conventions but conventional interpretations. His concern is not with what people do in fact say, but with how what they say is to be interpreted — does it make sense ? what are its implications ? is it consistent ? — in short, with meaning. But unless the philosopher consistently differentiates between words as abstractions and terms and statements as particulars, he will continue, like Wittgenstein, to apply the concept "meaning" indiscriminately to both. The germ of the distinction is perhaps in paragraph 43, but the book as a whole does not consistently maintain it. For *no* class of instances of the use of the word *meaning* can we define the word thus: "the meaning of a word is its use in the language." If my conception of meaning as interpretation is vulnerable for not really explaining how and why language is meaningful, it does at least acknowledge what Wittgenstein and others do not — the existence of a traditional problem that is still no closer to solution than before the advent of linguistics and linguistic philosophy. The meaning of statements cannot be reduced to the meaning of words, and the meaning of words cannot be reduced to an instance or instances of their use.

University of Hawaii Bennison GRAY

NOTES

(1) "Statement" is used here in the broadest sense to refer to any utterance that is linguistically intelligible.

(2) *Philosophical Investigations*, ed. and tr. by G. E. M. ANSCOMBE (New York, 1953).

(3) See esp. Gilbert RYLE, "Ordinary Language," *Philosophical Review*, 62: 171-181, April 1953; and "Use, Usage and Meaning I," *The Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 35: 223-230, 1961.

(4) *Cours de linguistique générale* (Paris, 1916; 4th ed., 1949), esp. "Introduction."

(5) For a good summary and critique of generative grammar see Punya Sloka RAY, "The Logic of Linguistics," *Methodos*, 13: 239-254, 1961.

(6) For example, L. J. COHEN's *The Diversity of Meaning* (London, 1962). Indeed, the burden of proof is on those (like Wittgenstein and Cohen) who blithely hypostatize from instances of *meaningful* language use a thing called *meaning* that must exist and therefore need defining simply because philosophers can talk about it. Pointing out the diversity of "meaning" is quite secondary to the need for justifying its use in the first place.

(7) For example, "Self-Evidence and Proof" in *The Idea of Justice and the Problem of Argument* (London, 1963). Also in *Dialectica* (June 1957) and *Philosophy* (Oct. 1958).

(8) "Use, Usage and Meaning II," *The Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 35: 232-233, 1961.

(9) See e.g. J. R. BRAMBROUGH's defense of Wittgenstein's 'solution': "Universals and Family Resemblances," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 61: 207-222.

(10) For an analysis of legal fiction more cognizant than most of basic epistemological problems see Lon L. FULLER's *Legal Fictions* (Stanford, Calif., 1967).

(11) Certainly linguistic philosophy has not discovered it. See H. J. Mc CLOSKEY, "The Philosophy of Linguistic Analysis," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 24: 329-338, March 1964. McCloskey demonstrates for the 'problem' of universals what I hope to show for the 'problem' of meaning — that the age-old dilemma is still very much with us.

(12) Findlay in the article quoted above calls for an intentional theory of meaning.

(13) See Wendell JOHNSON, ed., "Studies in Language Behavior," *Psychological Monographs*, 56, 1944.

(14) For a detailed analysis of these two conceptions of use as they have been offered as definitions of "style" see the author's *Style: The Problem and Its Solution* (The Hague, 1969).

(15) (Oxford, Mass., 1962).

(16) There have, however, been attempts to systematize this kind of rule-guided but non-necessary analysis. One of the most recent is Gidon

GOTTLIEB's *The Logic of Choice: An Investigation of the Concepts of Rule and Rationality* (New York, 1968). See especially the summary and diagram of his twelve categories on p. 170. The analysis is based primarily on legal reasoning, but Gottlieb suggests that, "It is perhaps also at the basis of the use of words and language" (p. 166).

([17]) This is not to be equated with the concept of "degrees of grammaticality," which is one of the linguist's devices for freeing himself from the self-imposed restrictions of non-semantic analysis. See e.g. the work of Noam Chomsky and other transformational-generative grammarians. Degrees of understanding is a much less pretentious notion — it refers simply to the amount of reasoned agreement that can be obtained about the meaning of a particular statement.