

The Use-Theory of Meaning and the Rules of Our Language Games

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While most theoreticians of meaning in the first half of the twentieth century subscribed to a representational theory (viewing meanings as entities *stood for* by the expressions), the second half of the century was marked by the rise of various versions of use-theories of meaning. The roots of this ‘pragmatist turn’ are detectable in the writings of the later Wittgenstein, the Oxford speech act theorists (Austin, Grice), and the American neopragmatists (Quine, Sellars).

Though it is now rather popular (and sometimes even fashionable) to invoke the use-theory of meaning, it is by far not so popular to inquire what such a theory really is. In this chapter we try to give at least a part of the answer, whereby we find out that the usual conception of such a theory is unsatisfactory. We propose that for an improvement we must, together with Wittgenstein and Sellars, conceive language as a (tool of a) *rule-based activity*, which enables us to replace the concept of *disposition*, usually constituting the backbone of the use-theory, by the concept of *propriety*. The resulting normative version of the use-theory then becomes the investigation of the rules which expressions acquire *vis-à-vis* the rules of the relevant language games – especially of the rules of inference.

1 What is (and What is Not) a Use-Theory of Meaning

According to a use-theory of meaning, the meaning of an expression is a matter of the way this expression is put to use by its competent users.

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In order to understand the nature of such a theory, based on the assumption that

- (*) *the meaning of an expression is the way in which the expression is employed by the speakers of the relevant community,*

we must distinguish this claim from the claim that

- (**) *any meaning an expression (i.e., a sound- or inscription-type) has, it has in force of the fact that it is treated in a certain way by the speakers of the relevant community.*

The latter claim is a simple platitude; there is hardly anyone today who would want to defend the contrary: i.e., the claim that meanings are natural properties of expressions not conferred on them by people.¹ However, it is easy to mistake (**) for (*), as it may seem that rendering the two claims identical requires only a broad enough construal of the term “use.”

In fact, there are *two* steps which we must make to get from (**) to (*). We need to accept that

- (i) the relevant kind of *treatment* is *use*;

and that

- (ii) if an expression’s meaning something is the result of its being used in a certain way, then its meaning is the very use.

What reasons are there to make these steps?

The issue (i) is admittedly largely a terminological one. However, it turns out that it is useful to differentiate between treating something, as it were, *in one’s mind*, and treating it *in the outer world*. The term *use* is then plausibly reserved for the *latter* kind of treatment (we may use the term *conceiving of* for the former one). In this way we can contrapose use-theories of meaning to various kinds of semiotic and representational theories which see meaningfulness as a matter of being taken to stand for something else.

¹In his dialogue *Cratylus*, which may be considered as the fountainhead of all philosophy of language, Plato considered two possibilities: either words are *natural* signs of things (and hence each thing has a correct name) or they are *purely conventional* (and hence there are no correct or incorrect names). Since Plato’s time, the latter option has prevailed and is now considered the only viable one: linguistic signs are, in de Saussure’s (1931) terms, wholly *arbitrary*.

Why should we see meaning as a matter of usage rather than of conception? The first thing is that conception is a private, subjective matter (at least until it becomes manifested by behavior), whereas meaning is essentially intersubjective. Indeed the *point* of meaning is that it can be shared by many: that new people can always enter the realm of a language, learning the meanings of its words and then participating in the language games staged by its means. As Quine (1969: 28) stressed, “each of us, as he learns his language, is a student of his neighbor’s behavior” and “the learner has no data to work with, but the overt behavior of other speakers.”

But would it not be enough to require that meaning must be *manifested in use*, rather than it being a *matter of use*? The argument against this is that once we have the manifestation, the manifested content of mind becomes, from the viewpoint of language, an ‘idle wheel’, whose presence or absence is not truly relevant. This is the point of the famous case of the “beetle in the box” of Wittgenstein (1953: §293):²

Angenommen, es hätte Jeder eine Schachtel, darin wäre etwas, was wir “Käfer” nennen. Niemand kann je in die Schachtel des Andern schau; und Jeder sagt, er wisse nur vom Anblick seines Käfers, was ein Käfer ist. – Da könnte es ja sein, daß Jeder ein anderes Ding in seiner Schachtel hätte. Ja, man könnte sich vorstellen, daß sich ein solches Ding fortwährend veränderte. – Aber wenn nun das Wort “Käfer” dieser Leute doch einen Gebrauch hätte? – So wäre er nicht der der Bezeichnung eines Dings. Das Ding in der Schachtel gehört überhaupt nicht zum Sprachspiel; auch nicht einmal als ein Etwas: denn die Schachtel könnte auch leer sein. – Nein, durch dieses Ding in der Schachtel kann ‘gekürzt werden’; es hebt sich weg, was immer es ist.

Note that this is not to indicate that linguistic communication cannot be accompanied by various kinds of mental activities, nor that it is not typically so accompanied, nor that the study of the minds of language users is uninteresting or futile. It is to say that in so far as language and meaning is something essentially intersubjective, the contents of minds of speakers cannot be its *components*.

²“Suppose everyone had a box with something in it: we call it a ‘beetle’. No one can look into anyone else’s box, and everyone says he knows what a beetle is only by looking at his beetle. – Here it would be quite possible for everyone to have something different in his box. One might even imagine such a thing constantly changing. – But suppose the word ‘beetle’ had a use in these people’s language? – If so it would not be used as the name of a thing. The thing in the box has no place in the language-game at all; not even as a something: for the box might even be empty. – No, one can ‘divide through’ by the thing in the box; it cancels out, whatever it is.”

Quine (*ibid.*: 29) comes to a similar conclusion: “There are no meanings, nor likenesses or distinctions in meaning beyond what are implicit in people’s dispositions to overt behavior.” However, this formulation reveals a snag in this kind of answer: the concept of *disposition*. A disposition is a property the nature of which is more or less unclear and which thus must be characterized in terms of the potential behavior of the entity in question in some special situations (thus, e.g., to say that sugar is soluble in water is to say that in the circumstance of being put into water, we should expect it to dissolve). Moreover, human linguistic dispositions are even much more enigmatic than dispositions such as solubility, for in that case it is essentially problematic to characterize the relevant circumstances.

The concept of disposition comes on board because we cannot simply claim: a sentence *X* means “lo, a tiger!” if the competent speakers emit it always when there is a tiger around; we know that many people might refrain from commenting on the presence of the beast (preferring, perhaps, to run away – and rightly so!). Thus, to improve on this claim we may want to say that *X* means “lo, a tiger!” if the speakers *tend to* (*have the disposition to*) emit it always when there is a tiger around. However, how to characterize this disposition? We should be able to say something to the effect that one is disposed to emit *X* in the presence of a tiger iff one *does* emit it whenever there is a tiger around and some further conditions are fulfilled – but which conditions? That the person in question has no reason to stay silent? That she wants to let others know? That she is not dumb, nor too lazy, nor afraid to talk, etc. (*ad nauseam . . .*)? Obviously none of this approaches an accurate characterization of the relevant circumstances.

These obstacles lead us into a true vicious circle: we claim that the meaning of a sentence is a matter of a disposition to utter the sentence; we reduce dispositions to specific behavior in specific situations; but in this case we are unable to specify the relevant circumstances otherwise than as those circumstances in which the relevant sentence is really uttered; hence we say, in effect, that the meaning of a sentence is a matter of uttering the sentence in those situations in which it is really uttered. Of course proponents of the dispositional analysis will claim that there *is* a possibility of characterizing the relevant circumstances explicitly (and that, moreover, the disposition is ultimately a matter of unknown, as yet, physical properties of the brain), but the fact that nobody has been able to progress very far in this direction seems to justify an utter skepticism here.

Hence I doubt that these obstacles can be overcome; it seems to me that the concept of disposition leads us up a blind alley and that we need a fresh start. However, we will abandon the topic for now and return to it later.

2 Why Meaning is Not a Represented Entity

We have seen that we may do well to regard the kind of treatment of expressions which grants them their meanings as a matter of the way we use them (rather than the way we conceive of them). Hence we have some arguments in favor of (i) (though, admittedly, they rely on the problematic concept of disposition). Now what about (ii)? Even if we do accept that meaning is determined by our usage rather than by our conception, why go on to say that meaning directly *is* the usage, rather than a thing linked to the expression by its usage? Why exchange the intuitively plausible model – building on the assumption that an expression relates to its meaning analogously to how a proper name relates to its bearer – for the *prima facie* non-intuitive notion of meaning as the ‘way of usage’?

The core trouble is that the operation of *naming* and the ensuing notion of *being a name of* or *standing for*, despite appearances, is not something reasonably capable of serving as an ‘unexplained explainer’. For what does it mean to be a name of something?

A proper name is usually associated with a person during an act such as christening; it is this act which establishes the relevant link. Hence it seems that we only have to find analogous acts conferring, in a similar way, meanings on other words of natural language. (And indeed this idea seems to underlie the accounts of language and its semantics given by more than one prominent philosopher.³) Hence, can we identify the alleged acts which make the types of sounds we emit, or of our inscriptions, into names or representations of certain entities? Preparatory to looking for these acts, we should clarify what generally makes an act into (an analog of) an act of *christening*.

We have put forward, as a paradigmatic act, the christening of a newborn baby; but clearly what makes something into the act relevant to our present search is not a church, a priest, nor any distinguished formula, nor a record in a registry office. Hence what is it? Obviously it is the way the act is ‘grasped’ by the members of the relevant community – namely the fact that they take it to establish the relevant link so that subsequently they take the sound- or inscription-type in question as standing for the christened entity.

However, what does it mean *to take a sound- or inscription-type as standing for an entity*? To conceive of it in a certain way? But we have already seen that the essentially private act of conception is not capable of grounding the essentially public institution of language. So the *taking*

³Viz., Charles Morris’ (1966) concept of *semiosis*.

relevant here must be a matter of some communal practices. That people of some community mentally associate the name 'Hugo' with a certain person is a fact of their individual psychologies not capable of establishing the fact that 'Hugo' acts as a name of the person within their language – for in order for it to be a name, it is not enough that each of them individually associates it with a person, he/she must also know that the other ones do the same, that he/she can use the name to refer intelligibly to the person in various public circumstances, etc. Hence what is needed aside of the private associations are some public practices that make the link public and shared. And, as we have already seen, once the practices are in place, the private associations become redundant – from the viewpoint of the institution of language (though not from the viewpoint of the psychology of communication) it becomes the idle wheel whose presence or absence is destined to be beyond notice.

This indicates that an explanation of language which rests on the relation of *standing for* cannot be considered as a satisfactory ultimate explanation, but only, at most, as an intermediary step, inviting the subsequent step consisting in the explanation of the very relation of *standing for*. And since resting this last explanation on the facts of conception would not do, we have to proceed to the level of social practices. Hence we must agree with Wittgenstein, who concluded, in the words of Coffa (1991: 267), that “the ultimate explanatory level in semantics is not given by references to unsaturation or to the form of objects or meanings, but by reference to the meaning-giving activity of human beings, of activity embodied in their endorsement of rules.”

To quote Wittgenstein (1958: 4) himself:

Frege ridiculed the formalist conception of mathematics by saying that the formalists confused the unimportant thing, the sign, with the important, the meaning. Surely, one wishes to say, mathematics does not treat of dashes on a bit of paper. Frege's idea could be expressed thus: the propositions of mathematics, if they were just complexes of dashes, would be dead and utterly uninteresting, whereas they obviously have a kind of life. . . . And further it seems clear that no adding of inorganic signs can make the proposition live. And the conclusion which one draws from this is that what must be added to the dead signs in order to make a live proposition is something immaterial, with properties different from all mere signs. But, if we had to name anything which is the life of the sign, we should have to say that it was its use. . . . The mistake we are liable to make could be expressed thus: We are looking for the use of a sign, but we look for it as though it were an object co-existing with the sign.

3 Rules, Rule Following, and Normativity

Wittgenstein's conviction was that the things we do with language are so multifarious that it is helpful to call them games: just as the term "game" covers a huge span from children's chaotic antics to the meticulously orchestrated Football Champions League, our linguistic practices comprise a large span of very different kinds of practices:

Wieviele Arten der Sätze gibt es aber? Etwa Behauptung, Frage und Befehl? – Es gibt unzählige solcher Arten: unzählige verschiedene Arten der Verwendung alles dessen, was wir "Zeichen", "Worte", "Sätze", nennen. Und diese Mannigfaltigkeit ist nichts Festes, ein für allemal Gegebenes; sondern neue Typen der Sprache, neue Sprachspiele, wie wir sagen können, entstehen und andre veralten und werden vergessen. (Ein ungefähres Bild davon können uns die Wandlungen der Mathematik geben.)⁴

However, his verdict about the heterogeneity of the games we play with language did not make him acquiesce within a linguistic relativism (though he is sometimes read in this way); instead it made him seek out what feature of these games gives language the special status it undoubtedly has. And as indicated within Coffa's characterization, given above, Wittgenstein became immensely interested in the fact that many of the games are *governed by rules*, moreover by rules which appear to be somehow *implicit*.

Why is government by rules so important? Because, as Wittgenstein recognized, it is precisely in this way that an expression can acquire meaning otherwise than by being made to stand for a thing. Meanings may be identified with the *roles* which the expressions play *vis-à-vis* the rules – roles of the kinds of those which make pieces of wood used in chess games into pawns, rooks, or kings.⁵

Why *implicit* rules? Because, as Wittgenstein realized, the rules of language cannot be all explicit – on pain of a vicious circle. We do have explicit rules of chess – we can take a book and read them there. However, to do this, we must know how to interpret the signs in the book – we must know the rules of their interpretation. Perhaps also these rules are somewhere written, but it is clear that the regress must

⁴“But how many kinds of sentence are there? Say assertion, question, and command? – There are countless kinds: countless different kinds of use of what we call ‘symbols’, ‘words’, ‘sentences’. And this multiplicity is not something fixed, given once for all; but new types of language, new language-games, as we may say, come into existence, and others become obsolete and get forgotten. (We can get a rough picture of this from the changes in mathematics.)”

⁵For a detailed discussion of the notion of meaning as a role see Peregrin (2006b).

come to an end and at some point we must be able to follow the rules of interpretation without their being explicit. Elucidation of the nature of the implicit rule-following practices was one of Wittgenstein's principal aims in *Philosophical Investigations* and subsequently became the topic of one of the most heated philosophical debates of the second half of the twentieth century.⁶

What is important is that the realization of the key role of rules enables us to dispose of the troublesome concept of disposition. The point is that, as we can now see, the correct description of the link between a sentence meaning that there is a tiger around and the fact that there is a tiger around is not that the speakers are *disposed* to utter the former in case of the latter, but rather that it is, for them, *correct* (conforming to certain rules of language) to do so. And whereas saying that one is *disposed* to do something amounts to predicting that given suitable conditions one will inevitably do it, to say that one would be correct in doing so does not involve any prediction of this kind.

However, does it not follow that the correctness claim is merely chimerical in that it cannot be confirmed or disconfirmed by anything the speakers of the relevant language actually do? Not really. The acceptance of rules, albeit implicit, *must* be manifested by what they do; but it is manifested "on the metalevel" – namely by what Brandom (1994) calls the competent speakers' *normative attitudes*. We *take* some utterances for correct and we *take* others for incorrect – which may be manifested in various ways, from praising or rebuking our children for the way they talk to granting our fellow speakers various kinds of statuses, from "respected" or "reliable" to "devious" and "untrustworthy."

Of course our linguistic utterances can be classified as correct or incorrect in various senses; and consequently we have, if not entirely a motley of rules, then at least a multiplicity of their layers. An utterance may be correct in that it accords with the grammar of the language in question; it may be correct in that it says that things are in the way they really are; or, it may be correct, say, in that it is not offensive to the audience. The rules directly relevant for semantics are supposed to form one of these layers: namely the one which has to do with, as Aristotle put it, "saying of what is that it is" and which is normally associated with the concept of *truth*. Hence we may say that the relevant sense of "correct" is the one in which we can say that truth amounts to correct assertability.

⁶The debate was greatly invigorated in the eighties by Kripke's (1982) book, which was followed by a number of responses – see, e.g., Baker and Hacker (1984), McDowell (1984), or Boghossian (1989).

To avoid misunderstanding: this does not pave the way to the straightforward naturalization of the concept of *truth* and *meaning*. The problem consists in singling out the kind of correctness which amounts to truth without relying on the very concept of truth. Understanding this peculiar kind of correctness is apparently a matter of acquiring a know-how which is explicitly manifested by our usage of the very concept of *truth* – with the result that the specification of the relevant kind of correctness has to rest on the concept of truth rather than vice versa (see Peregrin (2006a) for more detail). Anyway, we may say, the recognition of the normative dimension of language, which is brought about by the realization of the key role of (various kinds of) rules within our language games makes us replace the concept of *disposition* engaged by the non-normative use-theories of meaning by the concept of *propriety*.

4 Pattern-Governed Behavior

To sum up: crucial for the Wittgensteinian view of language games is the idea that most of these games have rules (rather like chess or football⁷), and that the rules of at least the most basic of them must not be explicit – on pain of a vicious circle. Hence somewhere between the view that playing language games is a behavior which is merely *regular* (the view which we may call, together with Sellars, *regulism*) and the view that playing them is following rules explicitly (which Brandom dubs *regularism*) there must be room for a third possibility.

This is not the way the problem was addressed by Wittgenstein himself. The philosopher who first pointed it out in roughly these terms was Wilfrid Sellars (whose crucial writings, by the way, predate the publication of *Philosophical Investigations*). Sellars insisted that besides the “merely conforming to rules” and “rule obeying” there is a specific kind of behavior, characteristic of language games, which he called *pattern governed*. His proposal is that “an organism may come to play a language game – that is to move from position to position in a system of moves and positions and to do it ‘because of the system’ without having to *obey rules* and hence without having to be playing a *meta* language game” (Sellars 1954; 209).

How can a person’s behavior become “pattern governed” in this way? Disregarding the possibility of its having been inborn (and it does

⁷As Lance (1998) duly points out, it is a *sport* like the latter, rather than a *game* like the former, that is analogous to our linguistic practices. What makes the difference is the extent of *embodiment*: A sport, just like language, is much more inextricably interconnected with our doings within the physical world.

not seem that our linguistic behavior *may* be inborn⁸), the only possibility left is training. We are, as it were, squeezed into the pattern, by being encouraged to behave in the right way and corrected if we deviate from it – in other words, by the fact that our tutors assume specific attitudes to our behavior. Hence, our tutors treat our behavior as *right* or as *wrong*, in this way instituting a *rule*.

Sellars also stresses that the pattern is something that we were taught by our tutors *ought to be*, and hence we take it that we *ought to do* what would bring this *ought-to-be* about. Thus we reinforce the kind of behavior of others, and especially of our tutees, which conforms to the *ought-to-be* and we disapprove of that which does not conform to it. This creates a circle, which (rather than being *vicious*) promulgates the pattern of behavior from generation to generation.

It is quite clear that there are many kinds of behavior, to be encountered across animal species, which would appear to deserve the label “pattern governed” (the bee dance being one of the popular examples). However, there is little doubt that these kinds of behavior *are* inborn, resulting from the pressure of natural selection. Human linguistic behavior is different in that it requires (besides natural selection) a *society* with its mutual ‘pressure’ of its members on each other. The relevant patterns are forced on us not (directly) by natural selection, but by the ongoing demands of our peers. From this viewpoint, a rule is a lever needed to put the exclusively human kind of forming and maintaining patterns to work.

The rules of the language games, just like the rules of chess or football, do not tell the players what exactly to do next. They restrict the spectrum of possibilities – they tell us what the next move, given the current position, *cannot* be; they always (perhaps with some trivial exceptions) leave us more than a single option (usually dramatically more). Of course: it is precisely opening up this space of possibilities out of which the players must choose which makes a game what it is. This means that the rules are plausibly seen more as constraints spelling out what *not* to do than as prescriptions of what to do.

What do the constraints of our language games look like? Consider assertion (seen by Sellars as a key move of a key language game). By means of it, a speaker moves to a certain position – “scores,” we might say. However, if this assertion contradicts an assertion already made, it does not count as “scoring” directly, but only potentially – directly it counts as a *challenge*: it challenges the asserter of the assertion with

⁸Though, of course, many of its predispositions and maybe also some of its ‘parts’ may be.

which the current one is incompatible to either *defend* her assertion or to *retract* it (i.e., retreat from the position gained by its means). And only if the latter is the case, does the assertor of the current assertion count as “scoring.”⁹ What is essential from the viewpoint of this rule of “intolerability of incompatibilities” is which pairs (or perhaps greater sets) of utterances are incompatible (and indeed we *need* a nontrivial incompatibility relation to play our usual game of argumentation).

5 Playing Language Games, Part I: *Man Against Nature*

Hence, can we now envisage at last a very idealized example of a game we play with language? What does winning and losing in such a game amount to? We saw that Wittgenstein would say that the ways of language are so multifarious that such questions may not have any answer at all. However, it is probable that some of our language games are central, and others only marginal; some are essential and others optional; some are more and others less important. Could we, then, get a grip on the nature of language by pinpointing *the most crucial* language game? But the most crucial in which of all conceivable respects?

As what we are interested in is *semantics*, we should seek a game which is crucial from the viewpoint of the *constitution of meaning*. We have already seen that it is rather problematic to see the constitution of meaning as a matter of naming or christening, or more generally of an explicit convention – hence what is the crucial kind of game? And is there a game *crucial* in respect to the constitution of meaning at all?

It might seem to be natural to turn our attention to logic – for is it not logic that is the ‘backbone’ of language, and lays the foundations of its semantics? Hence are there some results of logic which can indicate what kind of semantically crucial game(s) we play with language?

An early attempt to represent the basic part of standard logic in game-theoretical terms, and also to account for what Wittgenstein had in mind when speaking about language games, is due to Jaakko Hintikka (from 1973 on).¹⁰ What he did was that with each formula of standard logic (i.e., the first-order predicate calculus) he associated a game of two players, *Me* and *Nature*, so that the formula in question is

⁹Thus, this kind of scoring is not quite like scoring in football, where the goals are irrevocable.

¹⁰See Hintikka and Sandu (1997) for an overview.

valid iff *I* have a winning strategy; and it is contradictory iff *Nature* has a winning strategy. (For a fully interpreted language *My* winning strategy coincides with truth and *Nature's* winning strategy with falsity; in the case of a logical calculus there are, of course, many formulas with no winning strategy for either of us.)

For the first-order predicate calculus, the games, compared with the standard truth-definition, look as follows:

traditional truth-definition	the associated game
$R(i_1, \dots, i_n)$ is true iff the objects denoted by i_1, \dots, i_n are in the relation expressed by R ; otherwise $R(i_1, \dots, i_n)$ is false	<i>I</i> win the game associated with $R(i_1, \dots, i_n)$ iff the objects denoted by i_1, \dots, i_n are in the relation expressed by R , otherwise <i>Nature</i> wins
$\neg A$ is true iff A is false	the game associated with $\neg A$ starts with <i>I</i> and <i>Nature</i> swapping roles and continues as the game associated with A
$A \wedge B$ is true iff A is true and B is true	the game associated with $A \wedge B$ starts with <i>Nature</i> choosing either A or B and continues as the game associated with the chosen formula
$A \vee B$ is true iff A is true or B is true	the game associated with $A \vee B$ starts with <i>I</i> choosing either A or B and continues as the game associated with the chosen formula
$\forall x A[x]$ is true iff for every element i of the universe $A[x]$ is satisfied by I	the game associated with $\forall x A[x]$ starts with <i>Nature</i> choosing an element i of the universe and continues as the game associated with $A[x]$ with i in the role of x
$\exists x A[x]$ is true iff there is an element i of the universe such that $A[x]$ is satisfied by I	the game associated with $\exists x A[x]$ starts with <i>I</i> choosing an element i of the universe and continues as the game associated with $A[x]$ with i in the role of x

Let us consider an example: a statement of the form $((A \rightarrow B) \rightarrow A) \rightarrow A$, or, which is the same in classical logic, $A \vee \neg(A \vee \neg(B \vee \neg A))$. How would the associated game proceed? Do *I* have a winning strategy?

1. As the statement is the disjunction of A and $\neg(A \vee \neg(B \vee \neg A))$, it is *My* move and *I* must choose one of the disjuncts. Distinguish two cases: If A is true, *I* may, of course, choose it; and I win. Let us therefore suppose that A is not true – in such a case I choose $\neg(A \vee \neg(B \vee \neg A))$. (Let me remark that of course *I* do not need to know whether A is, or is not, true, and so *I* may come to choose wrongly and consequently lose even if there is a winning strategy for *Me*. However, what interests us is not whether *I* am really able to follow *My* winning strategy, but rather if such a strategy exists.)
2. As now we are facing a statement that is a negation, our roles are swapped and continue with the game associated with $A \vee \neg(B \vee \neg A)$.
3. This is a disjunction again, and hence again *I* would have to choose one of the disjuncts; but as roles are swapped, it is *Nature* who chooses. *Nature* is thus to choose one of A and $\neg(B \vee \neg A)$. As we have assumed that A is false, if *Nature* chooses it, she loses (she would win if the roles were not swapped, but unfortunately for her, they are), so let us assume that she chooses the second one.
4. The roles are swapped again (so that they are back to normal now) and we continue with the game associated with $B \vee \neg A$.
5. *I* choose one of B and $\neg A$; and of course *I* choose the second.
6. The roles are swapped and we continue with the game associated with A .
7. It is *Nature's* turn, and as A is false and the roles are swapped, I win.

¹¹One of the morals which Hintikka has drawn from these considerations is that the boundaries of standard logic are rather arbitrary. The point is that seen from this game-theoretical perspective, classical logic restricts itself to zero-sum two-player games with complete information. Especially the last restriction seemed unwarranted to Hintikka; and he started to investigate logics whose formulas may amount to games with incomplete information. The result has been his *independence-friendly logic* or *IFL* (see, e.g., Hintikka, 1996). The distinction between IFL and standard logic comes to the surface especially in the case of chained quantifiers: whereas in classical logic all quantifiers must be linearly ordered, IFL allows, in effect, for only a partial ordering: the associated games are such that some of the choices of individuals from the universe, made either by *Me* or by *Nature*, are made, as it were, in parallel rather than in sequence.

Hence we have shown that I have a winning strategy for every A and B – in other words we have shown that the formula $((A \rightarrow B) \rightarrow A) \rightarrow A$ (known as Peirce’s law) is a tautology.¹¹

In this way we see that the rules of logic can also have an ‘interactive’ reading – we can read them not as describing the truth or satisfaction conditions for various kinds of statements, but rather as spelling out rules of a language game. In this way, the concept of truth gives way to the concept of *winning strategy*, thus making the assertion of every sentence a game of its own, a game which the assertor wins if she is able to defend the truth of the assertion.

Hintikka’s great achievement was that he showed how the logicians’ activities of capturing the ‘logical backbone’ of language could also be seen as describing the most basic kind of language game we play. However, his games are not the kind we were envisaging above – they are duels of a solitary individual against the world, not social games in which people make each other conform to various kinds of patterns. Are we able to do better in this respect?

6 Playing Language Games, Part II: *Homo Homini Competitor*

Wrestling with the problem of meaning in mathematics, some philosophers came to the conclusion that what gives a *mathematical* statement its meaning are the ways in which it can be proved, i.e., inferred from axioms; and that meanings of mathematical terms are consequently their contributions to the inferential properties of statements in which they occur. In particular, Michael Dummett (1975, 1976) proposed generalizing this approach beyond the boundaries of mathematics – to see the meaning of a sentence as generally grounded in the ways in which this statement can be justified (plus what role within justification of other statements it may play). Hence could we perhaps see *justification* as underlying the game generally constitutive of meaning?

On first sight, this seems implausible. Outside of mathematics, we use language for many purposes utterly different from justification; justifying may be one of our language games, but, *prima facie*, not one outshining the others. However, we do also use the language of mathematics for many other purposes than proving – e.g., for formulating hypotheses, for storing knowledge, even for making jokes – and this does not seem to contradict the fact that proving is what is crucial for its semantics. So could it be that even with respect to the entire

natural language, the activity of justification, though by far not the most frequent language game, and certainly not the most important in all respects, is nevertheless responsible for what we see as meanings? Why should this be so?

The prototypical kind of meaning to be encountered in the context of a distinctively human language is a *concept*, typically the meaning of a common noun, such as “pig” or “philosopher.” As already Kant established, concepts are inseparably connected with *judgments* – concepts are, by their very nature, *constituents of judgments*. Hence to have meaning of the kind our usual words have is to be capable of occurring within sentences which are used to make claims. Now a judgment is something which, by *its* nature, exists within a logical space – for nothing is reasonably considered a judgment if it cannot be negated, conjoined with other judgments, inferred from other judgments, etc. – i.e., if it does not constitute, together with other judgments, a complex logical structure. Now the relationships constitutive of this structure can be reduced to the relation of inference – or better of (*correct*) *inerrability*.¹²

Games more closely resembling the actual practices of justifying and arguing about justifiability were presented by Paul Lorenzen and his fellow German logical constructivists. They saw their *dialogic logic* (Lorenzen and Schwemmer, 1975) as predominantly a tool of elucidation of the semantics of logical constants; for their games are devised to capture the most basic semantic operations which characterize the constants. Their approach, however, received very little international attention – until its rediscovery in the course of the recent boom of game-theoretic semantics.

Here the games are not those of *Me* against *Nature*, but games among participants of an argument. Arguments are seen as the putting forward, challenging, and defending of theses. The *Proponent* asserts a statement and the *Opponent* tries to challenge it, by attacking the asserted statement or its parts. He does so by means of asserting other statements, which can in turn be challenged by the *Proponent*. The *Proponent* wins if she deflects all the attacks and if there is no other way for the *Opponent* to attack her.

The rules, specifying what counts as an admissible attack and what as a defense against it are summarized in the following table (note that though *prima facie* one may defend oneself by asserting even

¹²Thus a conjunction of *A* and *B* can be characterized and the maximal statement from which *A* and *B* are inferable, etc. – see Peregrin (2006c) for more detail.

something unwarranted, this would be of no help, for whatever one asserts becomes a legitimate target of a further attack):

statement	the way(s) of attacking it	the way of defending it against the attack
$A \wedge B$	challenging A challenging B	asserting A asserting B
$A \vee B$	challenging	asserting A or asserting B
$\neg A$	asserting A	-
$A \rightarrow B$	asserting A	asserting B
$\exists xA[x]$	challenging	asserting $A[i]$
$\forall xA[x]$	challenging $A[i]$	asserting $A[i]$

The games within the framework of dialogic logic are then subject to some further restrictions, which do not concern individual types of attack, but the overall structure of the game. Standardly, the following constraints are in force:

- (a) The *Proponent* can assert an atomic statement only after it was already asserted by the *Opponent*.
- (b) It is possible to defend only the statement lastly attacked.
- (c) Only one response to an attack is possible.
- (d) An assertion of the *Proponent* may be attacked only once.

The loser of the game is then the player who can make no further legitimate move.

Let us return to our example $((A \rightarrow B) \rightarrow A) \rightarrow A$. (Within this framework, it is *not* equivalent to $A \vee \neg(A \vee \neg(B \vee \neg A))$ – which indicates that we are deviating from classical logic.) The game would now proceed as follows:

1. The *Proponent* asserts $((A \rightarrow B) \rightarrow A) \rightarrow A$.
2. The *Opponent* attacks by asserting $(A \rightarrow B) \rightarrow A$.
3. The *Proponent* cannot defend her assertion against this attack (for she would have to assert the atomic statement A , which is forbidden by (a)); however, she may counterattack and challenge the *Opponent's* assertion. Hence she asserts $A \rightarrow B$.
4. If the *Opponent* were to defend it by asserting A , the *Proponent* could use this to repeat this assertion and thereby eventually defend her original assertion; the *Opponent* is thus left with a counter-attack, which, by chance, again amounts to asserting A .

5. This is the end of the *Proponent*, for her defense would amount to asserting *B*, which is not possible due to (a). Moreover, she is no longer able to reassert *A* to defend her original statement, for this would break the law (b). The *Proponent* thus has no move left and loses.

In this case, in contrast to the previous one, there is *not* a winning strategy for the *Proponent*. This means that the set of statements for which there is a winning strategy for the *Proponent* within this type of game does not coincide with the set of those in which there is a winning strategy for *Me* within the previous one. What is remarkable is that, as it turns out, this set coincides with the set of statements which are valid within intuitionist logic. (And what is even more remarkable is that we can reach classical logic by canceling some of the above constraints. For example, as we saw, if we cancel (b), then there would be a winning strategy for the *Proponent* in our game.)

Anyway, here we have a *social* rendering of the interactive aspect of the logical backbone of our language – a game consisting in defending one’s claim against possible challenges. We are going to see that it is precisely this kind of game which may be seen as the basic building block of our everlasting meaning-conferring games.

7 Giving and Asking for Reasons

Hence we have some (very idealized) examples of the (simplest) kind of games which we play with language and which we claim are responsible for the meanings of our words. However, these games are rather like what are called “games” in tennis, i.e., each of them is only a small part of what we perceive as the truly significant game – the whole match consisting of several sets each of them consisting of several games. (It is, however, worth noticing that the distinction between a part of a game and the whole game is often context-dependent: sometimes a single set or perhaps a single tennis game could constitute the whole match; while sometimes even a match could be a part of a bigger venture – such as, in the case of tennis, the Davis Cup.) Hence what is ‘the whole match’ to which the games envisaged in the previous section add up?

Robert Brandom (1994), elaborating on the proposals of Sellars, suggested that it is our permanent game of “giving and asking for reasons,” characteristic of a specific feature of us, humans, as opposed to other kinds of animals. There are many language games we play, some of them closely resembling activities of our animal pals; but, according to Brandom, it is *giving and asking for reasons* which is

distinctive of us humans *as rational animals*. To be reasonable is to be able to reason, and to be able to reason is to be able to request and provide reasons.

This is, of course, interconnected with the Kantian observation mentioned above, namely that the *modus vivendi* of the distinctively human kinds of meanings consists in constituting judgments and that judgments need to be situated within a logical space. It is precisely this space which we can also call *the space of reasons* – the space maintained by our ability to reason and by our ensuing activities of requiring and providing reasons.

This brings us to a further distinctive feature of the human way of promulgation of patterns: the promulgation is social in a peculiarly human way. We can surely imagine that a kind of behavior which we would tend to call pattern-governed evolves simply as the result of the pressure of natural selection; and we can even imagine that a similar kind of behavior evolves not because individuals of the species in question have been naturally selected directly for this kind of behavior, but rather for the tendency to force the behavior on their fellow individuals, by somehow ‘rewarding’ them for behaving in this way and ‘penalizing’ them for deviations. Though this is imaginable (despite the fact that it might be hard to grasp why natural selection would act in such a roundabout way), this is still *not* the very kind of behavior characteristically instantiated by our language games. The reason is that the kind of patterned-governed behavior represented by them, and especially the game of *giving and asking for reasons*, though surely also underpinned by some mechanisms resulting from natural selection, is promulgated in a still more intrinsically social way.

The point is that in functioning as language tutors, we not only force the relevant patterns on our tutees but also make them do the same with *their* tutees (where the tutor-tutee relation is not a strictly irreflexive one – to a certain extent everybody acts as a tutor of everybody else). And, we may say, what makes this possible is ‘normativity’: the tutee not only comes to behave in a certain way, but also comes to grasp it as the *ought-to-be*, which makes her become a tutor herself. Thus, in contrast to the previous case, the tendency to force the relevant pattern onto others is not inborn, but rather acquired during the process of tuition in one package with the behavior itself.

Now we may ask: what makes this kind of ‘normativity’ possible – what makes us able to bind ourselves by rules? And one of the possible answers to this question, the one stressed by Brandom, is that it is our *responsibility*. (Hence another interconnection with Kant.) Rules of this

peculiarly human kind, those which “tend to propagate themselves,” may obtain because we are able to hold each other responsible for what we do – hence we are able to undertake *commitments* and to be granted *entitlements*. Thus, we take an assertor to be *committed* to defending (i.e., justifying) his assertion if challenged, and only if he is really capable of doing so, we consider him as truly *entitled* to the commitment. On the other hand, the audience of the assertor are *entitled* to adopt his assertion – to reassert it deferring its defense to him.

It is the filigree web of commitments and entitlements which is the normative substrate through which rules can exist without being written down – as “written in flesh and blood, or nerve and sinew, rather than in pen and ink” (Sellars, 1949: 299). It is the attitudes of holding each other responsible for what one does, holding each other committed or entitled to various things, which provides for the fact that what we do, including what we assert and infer, counts as right or wrong. And it is these rules of asserting and inferring which confer meaning on our expressions. In this way, the Brandomian story tries to flesh out the microstructure of the game of *giving and asking for reasons*.

What, then, about the macrostructure of the game, does it have room for something as winning and losing at all? What happens if an assertor does not manage to defend his assertion against challenges? It depends on many other circumstances; but in the majority of cases the consequences are not substantial. However, repetitive losing in this kind of game would mean, in the long run, descending the ladder of trustworthiness to the point of being wholly excluded from the range of people whose assertions (and perhaps other activities too) are to be taken seriously. This indicates that people need to keep track of their peers’ victories and defeats – how do they do it? Do we store some mental lists of people around us, with red and black points?

The problem of “scorekeeping in a language game” was probably first explicitly tackled by David Lewis (1979). Brandom’s version of the story is based on the assumption that what we keep track of are not directly any points (or victories and defeats) of our fellow language users, but rather their commitments and entitlements. If somebody asserts, say, that flat taxation is the way to prosperity, we ascribe to them a commitment to justify this claim (and also a default entitlement to it); and we register the general entitlement to repeat this claim deferring its justification to the assertor. When later somebody else claims that flat taxation is the way to impoverishment, we expect the original assertor to fulfill their

commitment, and if they cannot, we retract their entitlement to it, provisionally granting it to the new assertor with the commitment to defend *his* claim.

To sum up: since we humans recognize each other as potentially responsible beings, as potential bearers of commitments and entitlements, we continuously do deals with each other as players of various commitment/entitlement games (social practices), especially of the game of giving and asking for reasons. And this game is inextricably integrated with language – not only that it uses language as its crucial equipment, but it is this very game that makes language into what it is – what provides for its expressions to acquire their meanings.

8 Conclusion: A Normative Use-Theory?

We can, finally, return to the original problem of meaning and its use-theories: the normative version of the use-theory we have reached does not literally identify meaning with a *way of usage*, but rather with a *role conferred by rules*. This accounts for meaning as a specifically human matter – but not because a man is the exclusive owner of a mind-stuff whose chunks are able to animate dead signs, but because a man has the exclusive ability of binding himself with rules.

It is, of course, questionable if what we have reached should still count as a species of the use-theory of meaning at all. Maybe not – for what meaning here consists in is not so much the ways of employment of our expressions, but rather the ways of assessment of such employment, the ways we take those employments for right and wrong. It is precisely these takings for right or wrong, these normative attitudes, that provide for the existence of the kind of rules which govern our language games and thus open up the space of reasons in which the expressions may become meaningful. But be this as it may, I am convinced that this theory of meaning is the right one.

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