**Contemporary Anglo-American Philosophy 2019**

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**Lecture Order:**

**Ethical debate on the nature of Good:**

Geach—good is not a predicate, it is attributive (and also descriptive)

Moore—good is undefinable

Wittgenstein—there is only relative good

Anscombe—explains ethical duty through the idea of brute facts

Stevenson—the idea of emotivism

Bernard Williams—relativistic ethics

**The relation between sense, reference, object of reference**

Early Wittgenstein—the idea of Logical Picture

Russel—On Denoting

Strawson—the sense of a word it is how it is used

Late Wittgenstein—the idea of Language as a practice

Skorupski on Frege

Carnap—the idea of a logical structure of science

Kripke, Putnam and Donaldson (Chapter 6, resisting indeterminacy)

**New Foundations for Science**

Carnap—the idea of a logical structure of science (Stevenson, Hare)  
Quine—The Web of Belief (indeterminacy)

**The problem of Induction:**

Hempel—Empiricist Criteria of Cognitive Significance

Goodman—The new Riddle of Induction

**Redefinition of truth:**

Goodman— Ways of Worldmaking (indeterminacy)

Rorty—Solidarity or Objectivity, Mirror (indeterminacy)

Davidson—Radical Interpreter (indeterminacy)

Davidson—A nice Derangement of Epitaphs (indeterminacy)

**Historical Approach:** Frege—Vienna School—Indeterminacy—resisting indeterminacy

**Historical Context (Overview):**

In philosophy, as in culture, the modernist period (20th century) has been a period of renewal: both of hopes (the interwar) and bloody conflict (WWI and WWII). In philosophy, philosophers tried to redefine philosophy based on the data of modern science. This redefinition was an attempt to find new objective foundations for Ethics (Moore) and Philosophy. This movement was reflected by the Vienna Circle. By the empirical foundation they gave, ethics became useless. The modernist project failed since no objective foundation could be established, in this way indeterminacy appeared. The post-modernist representatives are Davidson (Truth and Science), Quine (Science), Rorty (Science, Williams (Ethics). The counter movement of post-modernism is resisting indeterminacy, these are Kripke and Putnam (Against Davidson and Quine) , and MacDowell (against Williams).

The title of the course is misleading:

—It is not contemporary, it includes also 20th century philosophy

—It is not only Anglo-American philosophy, important analytic philosophers are German

**Chapter I: Examples of Modernism, innovation of normativity**

G.E. Moore: *Principia Ethica*

Questions:

1.What is the meaning of Good?

1.1.It is Good indeed a simple notion?

2.How to choose how to act?

3.Which actions have the greatest value?

4.Is it what Moore does more than a play of word? Is it obvious that good is the same as

desire, as yellow is the same as a specific light wave?

5.What is the relation between ethics and science?

6.There are two types of ethical questions: which things should exist for their own sake, how one should act. The latter is defined in terms of the primer. How do we know what’s good for its own sake?

6.1. Does Moore resolve the problem of normativity?

7.Are language and concepts separate for Moore?

Content:

1. Moore argues that good is a simple notion, not made of parts, and thus is undefinable. Most objects are defined in terms of the parts they are made of (a dog is an animal with a tail, fur, four legs etc.). The smallest parts, the parts based on which other objects are made cannot be defined. An example of such a notion is ‘yellow’ (not the light vibration, but our perception of it). The same is good.
   1. The open-question-argument—a name latter given for Moore’s argument that Good is a simple notion. Is good undefinable? Good can be 1)a complex 2)has no meaning 3)undefinable. If good is a complex, then one can ask x is good only until all the elements which compose good have been enumerated. Thus, to prove that good is simple, one needs to prove that one can ask about any set of elements if it is good. Lett’s assume, that good means ‘x is desirable. One can ask about if ‘it is desirable to desire x’ and so on. Thus, no matter the number of elements one still can ask if ‘x is good’. Thus, good is not a complex. That one is able to inquire that ‘is x good?’, ‘is it good to desire x? means that good has a meaning. This meaning is distinguished from that of pleasure since one can ask if pleasure itself is good. Thus, good has a meaning. Since 1)good is not a complex and 2)good has a meaning, the only option left is to state that it is undefinable.
2. Moore believes in a form of consequentialism, that one chooses the action which believes that has the greatest value. By greatest value Moore means that this action contains better than other actions (or less bad).
3. It is very difficult to know this. Thus, most people do and should adopt customs.
4. Moore considers that good, as yellow, is not identical with its other properties. That yellow is also represented in space by a light vibration, it does not mean that what one perceives as yellow is the light vibration. The same is with good. Good can be represented in a circumstance as pleasure but it does not mean that good itself is pleasure. Good and yellow are undefinable. This means that the property which separates them from all other things is undefinable. Besides this undefinable property, yellow and good have other properties, which are definable (like light wave or pleasure). (Philosopher’s mistook good as being identical with its properties)
5. As the previous answer shows, ethics is autonomous from science. Good, an ethical concept, cannot be defined in terms of its scientific properties. It’s scientific properties, pleasure etc., do not transmit the undefinable essence of good. Ethics and good cannot be defined in natural scientific terms, thus good is a non-natural property.
6. Moore considers that no evidence besides the truths themselves can be brought for proving that these are indeed truly good for their own sakes. There is no criterion for establishing (proving or disproving) them, one just knows them. Moore through intuitionism does not want to state that a priori intuition is the source of their knowledge. Moore labels his position ‘intuitionism’. It is interesting that Moore, which is a modernism, falls back in a form of Platonism.
   1. Moore does not resolve the normative problem. The normative problem—what is the criterion for defining which judgement is ethical? Moore’s intuitionism makes it even harder. This is so since one is unable to use arguments for defending a principle and if two people perceive a principle different one cannot decide between the two which one is better. The idea of ethical knowledge is about being able to explain and argue ethical concepts. Moore’s intuitionism seems to make it impossible.

7. “Another striking aspect of *Principia Ethica* is Moore’s insistence that the issue of whether ‘good’ is definable or not must be distinguished from lexicography, that is the study of “how people generally use […] the word ‘good’.

Of course, most people (except, indeed, lexicographers) are interested in the things we talk about and not in the words we use to talk about these things; veterinarians are interested in horses but not in how we use the word ‘horse’. But Moore adds to this common sense idea two extra elements

* + 1. In addition to the things we talk about and the words of the language we use to talk about these things, he introduces a third realm, the realm of concepts.
    2. Moreover, (synonymous) words of different languages all refer to the same things.

When we are talking about physical things, this may seem plausible (but we will see below how Quine and Goodman offer reasons to doubt it even with regard to physical things). But with regard to a thing that is not physical (an object of thought or an idea, in Moore own terminology), it remains to be seen how plausible it is that a Greek word such as ‘agathos’ as used by Aristotle refers to the same thing as ‘good’ as used by Moore himself” (Analytics Handout I).

Conclusion:

1.Good is undefinable.

1.1.Indeed, good is a simple notion.

2.Choosing the action which has the greatest value

3.Most people follow customs, and this is ok for Moore.

4. No, Moore rejects the definition of good as equivalent with its (other) properties. That good represented by pleasure in a circumstance it does not mean that good is pleasure.

5. Ethics aims at a rigorous explanation of event, but ethics is separate from science. Good cannot be reduced to scientific properties.

6.There is no criterion for establishing if a statement has intrinsic ethical worth.

6.1. No, he does not offer a clear criterion for separating good from bad actions.

7. Yes, for Moore language and the concepts language refers to are separate

**Peter Geach: “Good and Evil”**

Questions:

1.Is good undefinable? (what is Good)

2.Is knowing what is good a matter of intuition?

3.What does Geach reveal about Moore’s text?

Content:

1. Good, for Geach is not a predicate, it is attributive adjective. To be attributive means that good is not an independent property. If X is a car and is red, logically X can be red without being a car, and X can be a car without being red. This is not the case of good. The manner in which X is good is always dependent on the property good describes about. Geach gives big and small as an example of attributive adjectives. If X is a fly and is big and Y is an elephant and is small, one cannot state that X is big while Y is small. Why? This is because ‘big’ and ‘small’ change their meaning depending on what they describe. A small elephant is still big compared with a big fly. The same is with good, X can be a good person, a good driver, a good tennis player… but X cannot be just good. Thus, Moore is wrong when he states that good is undefinable since good is definable depending on the object it describes. If x is a good baker, one already knows that good in this context is related with the virtues of a baker. Geach explains that Moore concluded that good is undefinable because he was unable to see that good is not a predicate, but an attributive predicate.
2. Geach through the previous argument attacks Moore’s intuitionism. Good is describable through describing the object good describes. Indeed, good is not identical with the noun it describes but in the same time has no independent meaning without it
3. “Good and Evil” reveals two things, 1)that good cannot be understood independently of it the object which is good (as explained above), 2)that Moore not only assumes that besides words and things ideas exist, Moore also considers that ideas can be independently understood—conceptual atomism. Moore considers that through words people express a common set of ideas (,enabling one to understand things). Moore considers that one is able to understand the idea of good in isolation from other ideas, he believes that there are simple ideas which can be understood just by themselves and from these complex ideas are built.

Answers:

1. It is undefinable since it does not exist ‘a predicative good’, good acquires different definitions depending on the noun it describes.
2. It is not a matter of intuition; it is a matter of describing the context in which one states that x is good.
3. It reveals about Moore’s text that good is not a predicate which can be understood independent of the object it refers to and that Moore believes in conceptual atomism. Conceptual atomism means that there exist concepts which can be understood in isolation and that by combining these simple concepts complex concepts are born. Quiz questions:

What it means that good is attributive, for Geach?

What is good according to Moore and Geach?

What are the similarities between ‘yellow’ and ‘good’ for Moore?

Why it is good undefinable for Moore and how Geach changes the logic behind Moore’s answer? What is the difference between concepts and language for Moore and its consequences?

**Chapter II: Breaking out of Discourse, a model for ideal language and thought.**

**Introduction on Frege:**

Questions

1. Can non-empirical justification exist ?
2. What makes mathematics so objective?
3. what is the notion of language or discourse that is presupposed in this account of exactness?
4. What does ‘exactness’ mean?

Content

1. Frege’s project is to justify mathematics on a logical basis by justifying arithmetic’s. Mathematics it is believed that it is able to reach an objective understanding of the world. Frege wants to define on logical basis all the concepts of mathematics, he wants to define what a number is and the nature of mathematical inference.
2. That it uses formal language, a set of symbols through which one can clearly see the logical structure behind them. A symbol is transparent, the meaning is not changed if instead ‘+’ for addition one uses ‘a’. That symbols are transparent leads to objective truth since 1)they can clearly be defined 2)the symbols themselves do not have any properties which make meaning ambiguous.
3. For answering this, one will need to read Russell and Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*.
4. For answering this, one will need to read Frege.

Answer:

1. Yes, Frege desires to justify mathematics in a priori manner.
2. That it is transparent, that the symbols it uses do not matter but the meaning behind them.
3. For answering this, one will need to read Russell and Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*.
4. For answering this, one will need to read Frege.

**Skorupski on Frege:**

Questions:

1. What is the basis of Frege’s logic?
2. What is the main intention of Frege’s project?
3. How does Frege prove a prior arithmetic?

Content:

1. The basis is that it translates ‘If B is true then A (A on the first line and B underneath), and B is true (it is asserted)’ in a logical language, instead of syllogism. Syllogism is based on natural language. To put a vertical line in the middle of a stroke is a negation. By introducing ‘negation’ Frege is able to build ‘and’ and ‘or’ with his symbols.

The second part of his basis is the replacement of subject-predicate with argument-function. An argument is the subject and it is attached to a function (it is the reverse of syllogism; the focus is on the predicate now). F(x)=x+3 (this is a function, a rule). Depending on the argument, (3), the function gains different values F(3)=6. F(8)=11 etc. Hydrogen is gay. F(g)=g. (g: ‘to be gay’). Hydrogen is an argument; it is just an instantiation of a variable. X loves y (function). God loves man (God and Man are arguments introduced in the function). By introducing functions and argument he introduced the universal and particular quantifier. Frege’s stroke notation is not so important since it is replaced with that of Russel. Russel’s notation is what we used in the Logic class, with the exception that (Ax) is just (x).

1. Logicism, he believed that arithmetic can be reduced to logic. The epistemological framework behind it is the concept of analytical. Analytical 1) narrow, analysing already existing content without bringing something new 2)broad, proving statements only through the use of logical steps. Only claims of type 1) are certain. Frege considered that a priori knowledge is possible and was not interested as Mill and Kant to even consider the possibility that a priori might not tell anything about a mind-independent world. Frege believes, like Plato, that knowledge without the senses is possible. The ontological status of non-physical objects (concepts) is not explained by Frege, he just assumes that numbers exist. Frege is against psychologism, considering that laws of logic are simply the psychological laws governing our mind.
2. 0 is the number falling under the concept not identical with itself. The rest will be detailed later

Answer:

1. The argument-function distinction and to use symbols instead of natural language as syllogistic does.
2. Logicism, he believed that arithmetic can be reduced to logic.
3. 0 is the number falling under the concept not identical with itself. The rest will be detailed later

**On ‘Skorupski on Frege’ and Logicism.**

Breaking out of discourse

* Discovering the basis behind language, the true logical structure of knowledge
* Mathematics along history has brought fruitful, exact and objective results.
* Frege considers that if he is able to reduce mathematics to logic, he is able to show and understand better the logical structure based on which we know.
* Mathematic is exact and objective because it uses transparent symbols. Symbols are transparent because they have no importance in determining the meaning of a logical inference. If the symbol for concept x is changed, the denoted concept remains the same. Since symbols are transparent, one can clearly see the structure expressed through them. Also, the concept behind symbols is always defined in a clear manner. The one creating a system of logic creates a clearly established set of components, denoted by well-defined symbols, and establishes how this component behave. Observing how these behave,



How does Frege proceed to break out of discourse?

* Through logicism, the claim that mathematics is reducible to logic and thus provable in an analytical a priori fashion. There are two types of a priori 1) narrow, that only claims which ‘anything about x is true just in virtue of x’ 2) broad, any claim which is provable through the use of logic alone. Frege adopts 2) and does discuss this distinction but not its epistemological consequences. Skorupski describes this epistemological consequence as that a 1) type of statement is always true while 2) might be false. The laws of logic we ‘assume’ are not necessarily true. This makes Frege’s theory attackable.
* Frege invents formal logic, as opposed to syllogism which uses natural language. Frege invents a new type of logic inspired from math. He wants to use this logic for explaining the nature of mathematics. This logic uses replaces the subject-object distinction which is linguistical with a logical distinction, between argument (subject) and function (predicate). In syllogistic the subject is permanent and the predicate changes, in Frege’s system is the opposite. Also, Frege uses a special graphic notation which did not survive ( unasserted content, it might be or not the case that A, but it is not affirmed yet.)



It is the case that B implies A. It is not the case that A



It is the case that x is an argument and A a function (Universal Quantifier):



Existential Quantifier (It is not the case that x is never the case):



* Frege’s project is platonistic, it believes that concepts are real. Frege does not explain why his assumption that concepts are real is true, he just assumes that what people know are objective concepts. Frege is against psychologizing, stating that the laws of logic are the same as those of psychology.

Counter-arguments to Frege’s position?

* Russel’s theory of types used for attacking self-reference makes Frege’s attempt to define numbers impossible since he states that there exists a class which can contain both the ‘class of the set’ and the ‘elements themselves’.
* The ‘Tonk’ argument. P tonk Q, tonk makes any claim true. Thus, logic by itself does not force one to reject x claim. Thus, logic by itself cannot be the basis of knowledge
* Against, ‘Tonk”, Gödel’s explanation that true claims which cannot be formulated in a system exist preserves normativity. Gödel also shows that mathematics is not as absolute as Frege wants to thing
* Tarski tries to use Frege’s manner of explaining numbers through logic by explaining truth in such a manner. Tarski affirms that ‘P’ is true only and only if p (T) ‘p’ if and only if p. Tarski uses formal language in order to eliminate the imprecise elements of natural language. Tarski’s ‘truth’ is a convention, a rule which states that ‘p’ needs to be called true if p is the case. Tarski fails since (T) ‘s’ if and only if s and s stands for ‘s is not true’. For escaping such contradiction Tarski divides the formula in two components: object language and meta-language. (Tarski needs to divide it in two languages since his logical language is semantically closed. To be semantically closed it means it contains ‘names for sentences’ and predicates such as ‘to be true’. A language which rejects this paradox would be semantically opened. Tarski’s meta-language is opened and his object-language is closed.) Tarski’s solution seems to work (T) ‘te iubesc’ in Romanian is true if and only if I love you. (The problem with this solution is that arithmetic’s cannot be proved this way. For full explaining that p is true one would need to also justify the meta-language and the meta-language can be justified just by relating it to another meta-language and so ad infinitum)
* Tarski and Gödel show that mathematics is not invincible as Frege thinks, that it cannot logically prove all claims without contradiction. The solutions given by Tarski would leave to a language without self-reference. However, self-reference is a necessary part of how one gains knowledge (the possibility to talk about something else that you say or have said, seems essential to reflection).

How does Frege describe the relation between outside discourse and the discourse?

* The answer to this question is in “Sense and Reference”.

**Frege “On Sense and Reference”:**

There is a debate between Frege, Russel and Strawson which lasted for 5 decades. This debate is about the exact nature of the relation between language and meaning, the underling logical structure behind language.

Questions:

1. What is the relation between concept, object and language?
2. How does this distinction between sense and reference apply to sentences?
3. Can there be words or sentences without a reference?
4. In which ways can a sentence differ?
5. Can one directly relate to reality?

Concepts:

1. There are three elements. Words (sign)🡪refer to 🡪Concept(sense)🡪refer to🡪object (reference). Sense means the “mode of presentation of that which is designated” (Gottlob Frege 1966, 57). (for instance, between ‘3 + 4’ and ‘7’) Both senses refer to the same object. ‘a=a’ and ‘a=b’ refer to the same object but have different cognitive value. By cognitive value Frege means that the primer is a priori analytic, and the latter is not analytic (e.g. water is water, water is H20).
2. Frege claims that all true sentences refer to the same object, the set of true things, but have a different sense (refer to it in different manners). The reference of a sentence is formed of the reference of its parts. (The sense, thought, is what constitutes a sentence. Some sentences can have no reference, have a meaning but no actual object).
3. Yes. There can be sentences for which even if one knows their sense, there is no object. To give an example, Odysseus, the smallest particle in the universe, the king of France is bold.
4. A sentence can defer depending on: idea, sense or reference. The idea is the subjective mental content of (impression one has about) the sense. (Bucephalus means different things for a painter, a zoologist, and a horseman). The sense is transmittable while ideas are not, ideas pertain to an individual in a certain period. The sense is the ‘meaning’, the fashion in which one refers to an object.

The moon analogy: “Somebody observes the Moon through a telescope. I compare the Moon itself to the reference; it is the object of the observation, mediated by the real image projected by the object glass in the interior of the telescope, and by the retinal image of the observer. The former I compare to the sense; the latter is like the idea or experience. The optical image in the telescope is indeed one-sided and dependent upon the standpoint of observation; but it is still objective, in as much has it can be used by several observers. At any rate it could be arranged for several to use it simultaneously. But each one would have his own retinal image.[…]. We can now recognize three levels of difference between words, ex-pressions, or whole sentences. The difference may concern at most the ideas, or the sense but not the reference, or, finally, the reference as well” (Gottlob Frege 1966, 59).

1. No, according to Frege. This is so since the manner in which one understands a concept is through language, as the moon analogy explains. We cannot compare our thoughts, judgments or statements with a reality that is not already presented through language, that has not already been ‘given’ through signs and their senses. This is very well expressed by the analogy with the telescope in the quotation above; the moon (i.e. the object referred to is only visible for an observer through the optical image of the moon in the telescope (i.e. the sense). There is no immediate cognitive relation between our thinking and talking about reality, that relation is mediated by language.
   * 1. Put like that, it sounds negative: we are never in contact with naked reality; language interposes itself between us and reality. But of course, it is really the other way round: the objects referred to are precisely given because we have words, expressions and sentences with their sentences. As mentioned, somebody who does not have the words, ‘dean’, ‘institute’, ‘university’ etc. cannot meet a dean of the institute. It also follows that our dependence on language does not need to commit us to some form of idealism. As the moon is there, even if there is no optical image in the telescope, so the moon is there, even if no humans have a word such as ‘moon’ or an expression such as ‘satellite of the Earth’.
     2. Nevertheless, a relativistic conclusion may be derived from this: if reality is given through words of a language with their senses or modes of presentation, what can be presented depends on the language of the persons thinking or talking about reality. As we said, a person who does not have the word ‘dean’, ‘institute’, ‘university’ etc. does not meet a dean of the institute. His reality does not include such a thing as ‘a dean of the Institute of Philosophy’. And, as Frege explicitly says, “the sense of a [sign] is grasped by everybody who is familiar with the language […] to which it belong” (Gottlob Frege 1966, 57–58). However, Frege avoids these relativistic conclusions by a Neo-Platonism that we already encountered in his account of the normativity of logic and in Moore. What we know when we understand a language is the sense that attach to the words, expressions or sentences of the language, but these senses are not themselves relative to language. People who know both English and French know that we attach the same sense to ‘moon’ and ‘lune’. In ‘The Thought’, Frege explicitly writes, that ‘thoughts’, the senses of sentences, belong to a third realm, apart from the inner world of the ideas and the world of things observable through the senses:

Answers:

1. There are three elements. Words🡪refer to 🡪Concept(sense)🡪refer to🡪object (reference).
2. Frege claims that all true sentences refer to the same object, the set of true things, but have a different sense (refer to it in different manners).
3. Yes, there can be words or sentences without a reference. (e.g. Odysseus was set ashore at Ithaca while sound asleep’).
4. A sentence can defer depending on: idea, sense or reference.
5. No, according to Frege. This is so since the manner in which one understands a concept is through language, as the moon analogy explains. We cannot compare our thoughts, judgments or statements with a reality that is not already presented through language, that has not already been ‘given’ through signs and their senses.

**Russel “On Denoting”**

Questions:

1. How there can be meaningful and even true statements about things that do not exists such as ‘round square’ of ‘the present king of France’?
2. How does Russel understand the relation between thinking and talking?
3. What are the differences between Russel and Frege?

Content:

1. Following Frege’s advice, that natural language is misleading, and one needs to find the underling structure of it, Russel gives a solution to the puzzle of meaningful statements about things which do not exist. Russel’s answer is that denoting phrases such as ‘the’ king of France’ give the illusion that they have a meaning since they seem to refer to an object (However, a denoting phrase has no independent meaning). Due to this illusion, Neo-Platonist philosophers such as Alexius Meinong (1853-1920) consider that these sentences speak about objects which exist in a realm of ideas. Russel’s logical analysis states that these phrases are parts of sentences but do not have meaning on their own.

A sentence as a part a phrase that creates the illusion of denoting a person who does not exist, such as ‘The present king of France is wise’ should be rewritten as ‘There is an x ((such that x the present king of France and x is wise) and (for all y (if y is king of France, then y = x))). This sentence does not talk *about* the king of France; it talks about x, about an entity and says that x is currently King of France. In this respect it says something that is not true (‘the mans’ has no independent meaning since it is not about ‘man’ as the subject, but of ‘only one x which has the property of being a man’).

1. For Russel, a sign has no sense, the meaning of a sign is precisely that it denotes something. Also, Russel considers that his logical analysis does not only clarify language but also establishes what it is. If Russel’s theory is true, then platonic concepts cannot exist. Also, Russel’s theory has epistemological implications. This epistemological implication is that one has no direct knowledge (acquaintance) in the case of Denoting phrases, one knows about an x which has the property ‘scot’. In this way one can have indirect knowledge about ‘other minds’ but not a direct relation with that mind (I do not understand this part, look at the handout)
2. “We see that the areas of agreement and disagreement between Russell and Frege are complex:
   1. We understood Frege’s claim that a concept’s sense is a mode of presenting whatever it is that the concept refers to, as indicating our dependence on concepts in thinking and talking about reality. We have no immediate relation with reality. Russell agrees that we lack in many cases such immediate access to what we are talking about: we can only affirm a number of propositions about the centre of mass of the Solar system (p. 478) or another person’s mind because we can describe it for instance by such denoting phrases as ‘the centre of mass of the Solar system’ or ‘So-and-so’s mind’. In these cases, our relation to these things is mediated through these phrases and our knowledge of these things is dependent on the phrases we use to describe them;
   2. Without denying this dependence, both Frege and Russell maintain that an immediate and direct relation with the object of thought and language is possible.
   3. But they disagree about how we should understand this relation of immediacy. Frege understands immediacy in terms of his Neo-Platonism: we do not really think by means of the words of an existing language, but rather by means of universal concepts expressed by the words of language. And we have an immediate relation with those concepts. Immediacy is the result of grasping the realm of real but not-actual concepts and their relations. As an empiricist, Russell rejects Neo-Platonism and its realm of real non-actual entities; immediacy is possible in instances of knowledge by acquaintance where we do have this immediate, direct cognitive relation between our minds and an entity” (Handout II).

Answers:

1. These type of sentences as a whole are false, since they refer to something which is not the case. The denoting component ‘the present King of France’ has no independent meaning and thus refers to nothing. Phrases like ‘the present King of France’ create the illusion of referring to something which might lead Neo-Platonists to believe in a realm of ideas.
2. For Russel, a sign has no sense, the meaning of a sign is precisely that it denotes something. Also, Russel considers that logical analysis not only clarifies language but has ontological and epistemological implications. If Russel’s theory is true, platonic concepts cannot exist. If Russel’s theory is true, one does not have a direct acquaintance with other minds but just with an ‘x’ which is considered to have the property of being another mind.
3. Russel agrees with Frege on some aspects and disagrees with him on others. See the ‘Content’ section for more info. (Russel is hard and I do not understand)

**Links which explain “On Denoting”**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=91NuS0VU2-k>

Kane B videos:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wXD3hfQP1DU&t=152s>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tdakVNsFzPE&t=1473s>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qQ7xz0MHBxA&t=108s>

**Strawson “On Referring”**

Questions:

1. How does Strawson reject Russel’s theory of the relationship between language and the world?
2. Strawson’s position arrives at a similar conclusion to Frege but with a different consequence from both Frege and Russel. What is this consequence?

Content:

1. Strawson affirms that Russel does not distinguish between 1)an expression, 2)the use of an expression, 3) the utterance of an expression. Strawson denies that a phrase as ‘the present King of France’ lacks meaning. A consequence of Strawson’s three distinctions is that he returns to Frege’s claim that not all sentences uttered are true or false. The meaning of a sentence of Strawson is not in the fact that the sentence ‘refers’ to x but in the general rules for using that sentence in making true or false assertions.
2. Strawson, against Russel and Frege holds that there is no immediate relation between thinker-speaker, what they think and what they speak. He thinks that in the context of communication there is no immediate relationship between expression and object. One can ‘use’ an expression to refer to a concept or can use an expression in different manners (imperative, performative). There is no one unique usage of a language.

Answers:

1. Strawson affirms that Russel does not distinguish between 1)an expression, 2)the use of an expression, 3) the utterance of an expression. A consequence of Strawson’s three distinctions is that he returns to Frege’s claim that not all sentences uttered are true or false. The meaning of a sentence of Strawson is in its use. The use of a sentence the general rules for using that sentence.
2. Strawson, against Russel and Frege holds that there is no immediate relation between thinker-speaker, what they think and what they speak. He thinks that in the context of communication there is no immediate relationship between expression and object.

**Wittgenstein *Tractatus***

### “Introduction

* 1. Strawson’s criticism of Russell dates from 1950. When Wittgenstein wrote his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus,* Russell’s theory of description still enjoyed the wide acceptance that Strawson mentioned on p. 2 of ‘On Referring’. And even after Strawson’s criticisms, it still continues to be accepted as a model of how we can resolve philosophical issues by uncovering the hidden logical structure of expression in natural language. Russell’s analysis very much lies in the background of the *Tractatus.*
  2. Wittgenstein’s Tractatus is one of the very few works of analytical philosophy that has fascinated people who are not otherwise interested in philosophy. It consist of statements organized in a strict numerical order that have been interpreted both as a plea for a purely scientific approach to philosophy and as containing a religious and mystical dimension.

### The preface

The confusion that the Tractatus creates in its readers, is neatly illustrated by the Preface. For as a Preface to a philosophical book, it is already quite confusing:

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### Main points of the Tractatus

[Read Grayling’s account of the *Tractatus,* see Required Reading #9 in the Required Readings folder on Toledo

Grayling does a good job in explaining the *Tractatus’* basic statements. But it might help if we clearly indicate the structure of Grayling’s account

1. Introduction 28-32
   1. System of numbering paragraph, 28
   2. Range of topics in the *Tractatus*, 28-29
   3. Overview of the main argument, 29-32
2. Structure, 32-39
   1. The conceptual task of philosophy (Wittgenstein) vs. empirical task in psychology (Russell), 31-32
   2. Structure of the World, 33-36
   3. Structure in thought and language, 36-39
3. Picture theory, 39
   1. Pictures, 39-41
   2. Propositions as pictures, 41-43
   3. Language – World, 43-44
4. Limits of language, 44-49
   1. Philosophy, 44-45
   2. Logic, 45-46
   3. Ethics and value, 46-49].

It will be obvious that the *Tractatus* is a puzzling book. Some of the confusion we feel in reading Grayling’s account are due to the condensed, abstract way, avoiding all argumentation, in which Wittgenstein has chosen to write the *Tractatus*. (This in itself suggests an interesting point about the role of arguments in philosophy: arguments not only demonstrate philosophical claims, they also clarify them by make explicit the connections between what we call the conclusion and what we call the premises of an argument).

But some of the confusion derives not from the manner of writing, but from the content of the book. Grayling (p. 49-55) records some of these puzzles and many of these are very puzzling indeed. But by far the most puzzling aspects of the *Tractatus* is the claim that there are limits to language. From the preface to the *Tractatus* (see above) we learned that this claim is absolutely crucial to the whole enterprise of the *Tractatus*. What’s more, according to Wittgenstein we can only understand it when we have experienced it ourselves.

Of course, we all have known situations where the words or terms necessary to make sense of these situations or express our attitudes towards them, are lacking or elude us. But those are situations where we as *individuals* lack the appropriate or necessary words. By extension, we can think of periods of history where the people of the past lacked terms that to us, people of the present, seem very useful in analyzing the situations the people of the past were living through (such as ‘class’, ‘inflation’, ‘vitamin’, etc.) We remember perhaps moments of enlightenment when learning or discovering new terms helped individuals or whole societies to describe their situations in a novel and liberating way (such ‘human rights’). In other words, we know of situations where individuals or communities lack words and run up to the limits of their language. But Wittgenstein is talking about the limits to language as such. What would that mean?

Grayling connects the thesis about the limits of language to the idea that there is a single essence to language: “to think that language is employed exclusively to make statements is to ignore a host of other uses of language – questioning, commanding, exhorting, warning and promising and much else besides” (Grayling 1988, 50). Yet it seem quite implausible that Wittgenstein would not know or try to ignore such an obvious aspect of language. Perhaps Wittgenstein’s project is not to explain how language in general works, but rather to offer a better account of the immediate relation between our mind and the world we talk about or think of. It is certainly possible to read (Grayling’s account of) the *Tractatus* as an attempt to realize this project.

And if it is Wittgenstein’s project to offer an logical or structural account of the conditions that must be fulfilled for it to possible to have such an immediate and transparent relationship between thinkers and speakers and the world, it is understandable that he only considers language as employed to make statements and to ignore the other uses of language that Grayling mentions. The real puzzle is why Wittgenstein would think that explaining how our statements ‘have direct contact’ with the world leads to conclusions about the limits of language” (Handout II).

**Wittgenstein “Lecture on Ethics”**

For a better understanding of Wittgenstein’s ideas on the limits of language it is useful to turn to the Lecture on Ethics. The lecture repeats the idea of the *Tractatus* about the limits of language as it applies to Ethics, that is judgments of absolute value:

[…] I can only describe my feeling by the metaphor, that, if a man could write a book on Ethics which really was a book on Ethics, this book would, with an explosion, destroy all the other books in the world. Our words used as we use them in science, are vessels capable only of containing and conveying meaning and sense, natural meaning and sense. Ethics, if it is anything, is supernatural and our words will only express facts; as a teacup will only hold a teacup full of water and if I were to pour out a gallon over it. I said that so far as facts and propositions are concerned there is only relative value and relative good, right, etc.

The lecture clearly retains some of the ideas of the *Tractatus*. Nevertheless, the lecture dates from several years after the completion of the *Tractatus* and we already see some developments from Wittgenstein’s ideas in the *Tractatus.*

* 1. As is clear from the quotation, Wittgenstein is now not talking about language or words in general but about “words as we use them in science”. This opens up the possibility of recognizing, even if it is not explicitly mentioned in the lecture, the possibilities of other uses of words or language.
  2. In the latter part of the lecture Wittgenstein describes two experiences that illustrate what he means by ‘Ethics’: the experience he has when he wonders at the existence of the world and the experience of feeling absolutely safe. These experiences are connected with the limits of language, but in a different sense from what we found in the *Tractatus* and in the quotation from the lecture above (and this new sense of the nation of the limits of language foreshadows certain ideas of Wittgenstein’s later philosophy that we discuss in Chapter 4).

To say “I wonder at such and such being the case” has only sense if I can imagine it *not* to be the case. In this sense one can wonder at the existence of, say, a house when one sees it and has not visited it for a long time and has imagined that it had been pulled down in the meantime. But it is nonsense to say that I wonder at the existence of the world, because I cannot imagine it not existing. I could of course wonder at the world round me being as it is. If for instance I had this experience while looking into the blue sky, I could wonder at the sky being blue as opposed to the case when it's clouded. But that's not what I mean. I am wondering at the sky being whatever it is.[…] Now the same applies to […] the experience of absolute safety. We all know what it means in ordinary life to be safe. I am safe in my room, when I cannot be run over by an omnibus. I am safe if I have had whooping cough and cannot therefore get it again. To be safe essentially means that it is physically impossible that certain things should happen to me and therefore it's nonsense to say that I am safe whatever happens. Again this is a misuse of the word “safe” as the other example was of a misuse of the word “existence” or “wondering.” Now I want to impress on you that a certain characteristic misuse of our language runs through all ethical and religious expressions. All these expressions seem, prima facie, to be just similes. Thus it seems that when we are using the word right in an ethical sense, although, what we mean, is not right in its trivial sense, it's something similar and when we say “This is a good fellow,” although the word good here doesn't mean what it means in the sentence “This is a good football player” there seems to be some similarity.

* 1. The experience are connected to the limits of language in that the “the verbal expression” of these experiences are the result of what Wittgenstein initially calls a misuse of language resulting in nonsense. This echoes the ideas of Wittgenstein that we already know. But in this passage Wittgenstein introduces a new sense of ‘misuse’ of language that will prove very important in his later work. It is not a matter of using words to express something that is not scientific. Misuse of language does not here lie in a proposition not being a picture of a fact in the world. Misuse results from applying a word outside of the context of its ordinary use. This happens, for example, when we us an expression ‘safe from’ that we, in ordinary life, use to say that certain specific dangers (being run over by a bus) are impossible, in order to express that we feel safe against anything that may happen. As Wittgenstein indicates with his mention of similes, such ‘misuse’ of language is an essential part of literary or poetic language. On the other hand, Wittgenstein does not explain why such literary language would be a misuse of language (rather than merely a use of language). But in any case, this discussion appears to show that Wittgenstein recognizes we can extend the possibilities for expression by using language creatively, introducing words in novel contexts.
  2. In this respect it is disappointment that Wittgenstein on the two last pages of the lecture resumes his argument that that such literary use is a form of running against the limits of language (p. 11-12).

[…] these nonsensical expressions were not nonsensical because I had not yet found the correct expressions, but that their nonsensicality was their very essence. For all I wanted to do with them was just *to go beyond* the world and that is to say beyond significant language. My whole tendency and I believe the tendency of all men who ever tried I to write or talk Ethics or Religion was to run against the boundaries of language. This running against the walls of our cage is perfectly, absolutely hopeless. Ethics so far as it springs from the desire to say something about the ultimate meaning of life, the absolute good, the absolute valuable, can be no science. What it says does not add to our knowledge in any sense. But it is a document of a tendency in the human mind which I personally cannot help respecting deeply and I would not for my life ridicule it.

This quotation does confirm, however, that Wittgenstein’s claims in the Lecture and presumably also in the *Tractatus* about the limits of language are so many attempts at “seeking to protect matters of value from the debunking encroachments of science” (Grayling 1988, 47).

* 1. It is interesting to note that the description of these experiences are not merely intended as illustrations of the views presented in the lecture. Wittgenstein describes these experiences “in order, if possible, to make you recall the same or similar experiences, so that we may have a common ground for our investigation” (Wittgenstein 1965, 8). An investigation of ethics requires a ground in experiences that we have had. This recalls the sentence in the Preface of the Tractatus \*.
  2. Taking together these two last remarks about the limits of language and a ground in experience suggest an idea of limits to language that is different from what we read in the Tractatus and was suggested by the analogy with a teacup: language can be limited in that we can only get across what we want to express provided what we are talking about resonates in the experience of the listener. Communication requires experience and even a common experience. If we have never experienced those feelings of absolute safety or of wonder about the world, Wittgenstein will not be able to get across what he means. If we deliberate about what to do, explaining the pain, unhappiness or misery of others that may result from choosing one option is of course highly relevant But mere words will not persuade a psychopath who has never experience any empathy with others, to care about the pain, unhappiness or misery of others.

**Chapter III: The Scientific World Conception: The Vienna Circle**

**Introduction: The aim of The Vienna Circle**

Questions

1. What is the historical context of the Vienna Circle?
2. What is the approach of the Vienna Circle?
3. What is the goal of the Vienna Circle?
4. How is a “scientific world conception” defined?

Content

1. The Vienna Circle appeared in the 20th century when a professor at The University of Vienna invited a group of scientists, mathematicians and philosophers to discuss on several topics. One of the topics is Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*. These topics were about the foundation of science. The Vienna Circle became popular and thus international circles have been formed where similar topics were discussed. Due to the Nazi occupation of Germany the members of the Vienna Circle moved to United States or Britain.
2. The approach of the Vienna Circle is ‘logical empiricism’. The Vienna Circle’s empiricism is based on the work of Austrian scientists, but they also admit the influence of older thinkers such as David Hume or J.S. Mill. Besides empiricism, the Vienna Circle uses the new type of logic invented by Frege and developed by Russell. (This combination, empiricism plus new logic leads to the name of ‘logical empiricism’)
3. The goal of the Vienna Circle is to adopt a “scientific world conception”. Even if these scientists and philosophers have different perspectives, the idea of a “scientific world conception” unites them.
4. For The Vienna Circle, a “scientific world conception” is a certain attitude. This attitude is characterised by (Carnap, pages 5-8):
   1. **Goal:** The goal is to unify (link and harmonize) the perspectives in different fields in science.
   2. **Method:** In alignment with the goal, the method is that of emphasizing collective efforts and what can be grasped intersubjective.
   3. **Medium:** They search for a formal language, neuter symbols, not affected by the historical aspects of ordinary language. Also, they search for a system of concepts which is able to tell about anything.
   4. **Worldliness:** The Vienna Circle strive for a concrete understanding of the world, without obscure notions and ‘deep’ ideas. For The Vienna Circle, the world cannot contain inaccessible parts, in this sense man is the measure of all things for them. Also, for them the world is a complex network which can be understood only by looking at parts of it.
   5. **Task of Philosophy:** To identify which of the previous problems of philosophy were pseudo-problems and to transform all philosophical problems in empirical problems. (All empirical problems are subjugated by the judgement of experimental science)
   6. **Logical Analysis:** The Vienna Circle believe that all statements should be reduced to statements which denote a state of affairs. If a claim which is believed to state something about the world but in fact states nothing, then that thing is a pseudo-concept.
   7. **Social and political dimension:** The needfor theological and metaphysical claims is the result of economic struggles, for The Vienna Circle. The development of technology leaves less space for metaphysical ideas. People in general become disappointed of the attitude of the ones which adopt metaphysical idea. The scientific, rational, mindset is popularised in schools and becomes a part of social life.

Answers

1. The Vienna Circle appeared in the 20th century when a professor at The University of Vienna invited a group of scientists, mathematicians and philosophers to discuss on several topics. Due to the Nazi occupation of Germany the members of the Vienna Circle moved to United States or Britain.
2. The approach of the Vienna Circle is ‘logical empiricism’. Besides empiricism, the Vienna Circle uses the new type of logic invented by Frege and developed by Russell.
3. The goal of the Vienna Circle is to adopt a “scientific world conception”. Even if these scientists and philosophers have different perspectives, the idea of a “scientific world conception” unites them.
4. For The Vienna Circle, a “scientific world conception” is a certain attitude. This attitude is characterised by (Carnap, pages 5-8): goal, method, medium, Worldliness, Tasks of philosophy, Logical Analysis, Social and Political dimension.

**The Vienna Circle and the logical criticism of metaphysics**

Questions

1. What is The Vienna Circle’s position to Mysticism?
2. Why is logic crucial for The Vienna Circle?
3. Which are the two central logical mistakes of metaphysicians?

Content

1. Mysticism, for The Vienna Circle, is not about concepts but about expressing feelings. Since the content of the mystic cannot be reduce to experience, they do not talk about concepts. The Mystic can do art, express his emotions but not science, the mystic is unable to use language for telling one anything about the world.
2. Logic is crucial for The Vienna Circle for two reasons, it explains the underlying structure of language and it facilitates the unification of scientific views.
3. Two common logical errors made by metaphysicians, for Carnap, are
   * 1. that through natural language they misleadingly consider that qualities (hardness), relations (friendship) and processes (sleep) are thing-like concepts. This happens since nouns for expressing both objects and qualities, relations, processes etc.
     2. that they believe that through pure logic one can get new knowledge. This is so since logical analysis shows that logical inferences can be only tautologies. Thus, a logical inference cannot lead to new knowledge without being based on empirical claims.

Answer

1. Mysticism, for The Vienna Circle, is not about concepts but about expressing feelings. Since the content of the mystic cannot be reduce to experience, they do not talk about concepts.
2. Logic is crucial for The Vienna Circle for two reasons, it explains the underlying structure of language and it facilitates the unification of scientific views.
3. Two common logical errors made by metaphysicians, for Carnap, are 1)that since nouns express both things and qualities, relations, process the latter are things-like; 2)that since logical inferences can be only tautologies, philosophy without empirical content cannot bring anything new.

**The Vienna Circle and the verifiability principle**.

Questions

1. Based on what does The Vienna Circle determine the cognitive value of statements?

Content

1. The Vienna Circle determines the cognitive value of statements based on the verifiability principle. The verifiability principle establishes which claims have or do not have any cognitive value. For The Vienna Circle, metaphysical claims have no cognitive value. The verifiability principle is that a claim has cognitive value only if one knows which observations would make it true or false.
2. The idea behind the verifiability principle is reasonable, in the sense that for a sentence to have cognitive value it is expected that one is able to explain under what conditions is it true or false. If one tells that: Some cars are pong and others are not pong but when can never know when things are pong or not, then pong has no cognitive value. To have cognitive value means to be able to tell when x is true or not.

The Vienna Circle’s idea of verifiability is narrower than depicted in the previous paragraphs. If a claim cannot be explained in empirical terms than it has no cognitive value. Lying is bad or Nicole is a good actress cannot be proved just by empirical claims.

Answer

1. The Vienna Circle determines the cognitive value of statements based on the verifiability principle. The verifiability principle establishes which claims have or do not have any cognitive value. For The Vienna Circle, metaphysical claims have no cognitive value. The verifiability principle states that if a claim cannot be explained in empirical terms than it has no cognitive value.

**Carnap’s *The* *Logical Structure of The World*.**

Questions

1. What is Carnap’s project in *The* *Logical Structure of The World?*
2. What is Carnap’s idea of ‘construction’?
3. What are the basic elements in Carnap’s construction?
4. What is a structure description for Carnap?

Content

1. Carnap’s project in *The* *Logical Structure of The World* is to create a unified system of concepts that contain all knowledge and is empirically based. Carnap’s text is an attempt at creating such a system from only a small set of concepts. Carnap wants to build all other concepts from fundamental concepts
2. Carnap’s idea of construction is that a concept A can be reduced to, or reconstructed, through concept B. For B to construct A two conditions need to be met: 1)that the extension of A and B to be the same 2)that the connection between A and B is not accidental, but logically necessary or necessary according to the laws of nature.
3. For Carnap, the basic ideas from which all other ideas need to be constructed are individual experiences of the self. Cultural ideas can be reduced to physical or psychological objects. The psychological objects can be reduced to physical objects. Physical objects can be reduced to the individual experiences of the self. By individual experiences of the self Carnap does not mean (colour, sound, smell etc.) but the whole content of what one perceives in one moment.
4. A structure description for Carnap is describing on object just based on the relations between that object and other objects. For Carnap, all ideas need to be reduced to individual experience. Each of these individual experiences needs to be definable in terms of their relation with the rest of the individual experiences. For Carnap, this is a necessary condition for science to be objective, their needs to exist a logical structure of all things. This does not mean that one does not need to look at experience for finding those individual experiences which then relate to each other. Carnap wants to express all ideas in formal logic. Carnap’s project of reducing all ideas to self-experiences does not work, however the idea behind this project influences Carnap’s carrier. (To explain how a structural description is possible he gives the example of city map analogy)

Answer

1. Carnap’s project in *The* *Logical Structure of The World* is to create a unified system of concepts that contain all knowledge and is empirically based.
2. Carnap’s idea of construction is that a concept A can be reduced to, or reconstructed, through concept B.
3. For Carnap, the basic ideas from which all other ideas need to be constructed are individual experiences of the self.
4. A structure description for Carnap is describing on object just based on the relations between that object and other objects.

**The Problem of Normativity**

Questions

1. What is the problem of normativity, in the context of The Vienna Circle?
2. If one rejects non-empirical definitions of good, then what definitions remain?

Content

1. The problem of normativity is that one cannot exactly define ‘what is good’. According to the Vienna Circle verifiability principle ethical claims do not have cognitive content since they are not based on experience. Moore has an a priori explanation of ‘good’ which is not compatible with The Vienna Circle.
2. Rejecting all non-empirical manners of defining it leads to two options: 1)good just describes how people react, not how people should react 2)good describes how people should react when a goal is set, e.g. pursuing happiness. Moore’s naturalist fallacy is that good cannot be defined in terms of its properties since always one can ask if x is good (good is undefinable and not made of parts). Moore’s criticism makes logical positivists to realise that ethical claims do not have cognitive value.

Answer

1. The problem of normativity is that one cannot exactly define ‘what is good’. According to the Vienna Circle verifiability principle ethical claims do not have cognitive content since they are not based on experience.
2. Rejecting all non-empirical manners of defining it leads to two options: 1)good just describes how people react, not how people should react 2)good describes how people should react when a goal is set, e.g. pursuing happiness. Moore’s criticism makes logical positivists to realise that ethical claims do not have cognitive value.

**Stevenson “The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms”**

Questions

1. Is good for Stevenson definable by science?
2. If good has no cognitive meaning, does good have any meaning for Stevenson?
3. What is the main criticism to Stevenson’s ethical position?
4. Is able Stevenson to defend the normativity of ethics?

Content

1. For Stevenson, goodness cannot be defined by science. Thus, Steven accepts Moore’s open-argument, that one can ask about anything if that thing is good. However, Steven rejects Moore’s intuitionist argument.
2. Yes, since Stevenson considers that good has an emotive meaning. The emotive meaning of a word means that some words through the history of their usage create a certain affective response. Stevenson translates “This is bad” as I disapprove of this, so should you. “This is good” I approve this, so should you.
3. The main criticism to Stevenson’s position is that defining “good” as I approve, so should you, does not work in conditional claims. If stealing is bad, tax invaders should be put to jail. This claim cannot be translated as I disapprove of stealing, so should you, and thus tax invaders need to be in jail.
4. Stevenson’s position is not able to defend normativity. This is so since the defence he brings can be attacked. His defence is that ethical claims are not about objective prescriptive rules but about persuasion. Who persuades better is ethically right? Stevenson’s point is that language does not have only cognitive (descriptive) meaning, but also affective (dynamic) meaning.

Answer

1. For Stevenson, goodness cannot be defined by science. However, Steven rejects Moore’s intuitionist argument.
2. Yes, since Stevenson considers that good has an emotive meaning. Stevenson translates “This is bad” as I disapprove of this, so should you.
3. The main criticism to Stevenson’s position is that defining “good” as I approve, so should you, does not work in conditional claims.
4. Stevenson’s position is not able to defend normativity. This is so since the defence he brings can be attacked. Who persuades better is ethically right?

**Hare (prescriptivism), A Solution for Stevenson**

Questions

1. How does Hare’s prescriptivism solve the critique to the main criticism to Stevenson?
2. What does the prescriptive meaning of a word mean?
3. Are all prescriptive claims ethical for Hare?
4. Why are prescriptive claims compatible with conditional statements?

Content

1. Hare’s resolves the problem by replacing Stevenson’s emotive meaning with prescriptive meaning. Hare’s solution resolves the critique to Stevenson since prescriptive meaning are compatible with conditional statements.
2. For Hare, ethical claims are not descriptive but prescriptive, they tell people what to do. Such claims cannot be reduced to statements of facts. (Hare agrees with Moore when ‘good cannot be defined in terms of its properties)
3. Not, for Hare, a claim needs to satisfy three conditions for being ethical: it needs to be prescriptive, it needs to be universal and these claims are able to form logical relations between them. For Hare, that ethical claims need to be universal means that ethical claims need to tell general rules for conduct.
4. Prescriptive claims are compatible with logical inferences since modus ponens works with it. The proof that it works is that a prescriptive claim is “x is a rule” and “If ‘x is a rule’ y is bad and ‘x is a rule’, then y is indeed bad. There is no logical reason for making this inference untrue.

Answer

1. Hare’s solution resolves the critique to Stevenson since prescriptive meaning are compatible with conditional statements.
2. For Hare, ethical claims are not descriptive but prescriptive, they tell people what to do.
3. Not, for Hare, a claim needs to satisfy three conditions for being ethical: it needs to be prescriptive, it needs to be universal and these claims are able to form logical relations between them.
4. Prescriptive claims are compatible with logical inferences since modus ponens works with it.

**Objections to Logical Empiricism**

**Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*.**

Questions:

1. What are the meta-physical presuppositions of logical positivism, according to Rorty?

Content:

1. According to Rorty, the logical positivists build their theory upon presuppositions dating back to Descartes, Kant, Lock and Plato. Kant—philosophy as a discipline is the arbiter of all knowledge claims from other disciplines, philosophy replaces religions in explaining one’s convictions and giving meaning to one’s life. Lock—philosophy needs to analyse how one is able to accurately represent the external world. Claims need to be divided into claims which represent the world well, claims which represented it not so well, claims which fail to represent it. Descartes—the idea that the mind is a separate entity which investigates how external factors cause an idea to appear in one’s mind.

### Rorty

[Read Rorty, Richard. 1991. ‘Solidarity or Objectivity? (1985)’. In *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth. Philosophical Papers*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 3–19, see Required Reading # 10 in the Required Readings folder on Toledo].

* 1. In the previous chapter, we discussed Rorty’s analysis of the preconceptions underlying logical empiricism’s scientific world view in his very influential book *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Among these preconceptions are the clam that 1) philosophy can judge what discourses constitute knowledge and 2) that to know is to represent accurately what is outside the mind.
  2. In later work, he in a sense returns to the topics that were important to the logical empiricists and tries to explain how we should think the role of philosophy, about science and about the way we give meaning in our social and personal life when we have given up the preconceptions such as those espoused by the logical empiricists.
  3. In fact, he distinguishes two ways of explaining the significance of our lives.

There are two principal ways in which reflective human beings try, by placing their lives in a larger context, to give sense to those lives. The first is by telling the story of their contribution to a community. This community may be the actual historical one in which they live, or another actual one, distant in time or place, or a quite imaginary one, consisting perhaps of a dozen heroes and heroines selected from history or fiction or both. The second way is to describe themselves as standing in immediate relation to a nonhuman reality. This relation is immediate in the sense that it does not derive from a relation between such a reality and their tribe, or their nation, or their imagined band of comrades. I shall say that stories of the former kind exemplify the desire for solidarity, and that stories of the latter kind exemplify the desire for objectivity. Insofar as a person is seeking solidarity, he or she does not ask about the relation between the practices of the chosen community and something outside that community. Insofar as he seeks objectivity, he distances himself from the actual persons around him not by thinking of himself as a member of some other real or imaginary group, but rather by attaching himself to something that can be described without reference to any particular human beings, (Rorty 1991, 167).

* + 1. This distinction between two ways of giving sense to our lives rests on a conception of what is to have knowledge and to speak or believe what is true.
* Inspired by Wittgenstein, we can think of epistemology as a game; it includes rules or criteria determining who has knowledge or true belief and who does not. Developing Wittgenstein’s ideas about games, we might think of these criteria as contingent criteria that our culture happens to accept. (Compare when a certain group has very complex dietary rules, one member of the group can be said to have knowledge when we can determine who can eat what and when according to those rules). Rorty’s opponents, whom he calls ‘realist’s, have a very different idea of epistemology and criteria of knowledge and truth, however.

Those who wish to ground solidarity in objectivity – call them “realists” – have to construe truth as correspondence to reality. So they must construct a metaphysics that has room for a special relation between beliefs and objects which will differentiate true from false beliefs. They also must argue that there are procedures of justification of belief, which are natural and not merely local. So they must construct an epistemology that has room for a kind of justification that is not merely social but natural, springing from human nature itself, and made possible by a link between that part of nature and the rest of nature. On their view, the various procedures thought of as providing rational justification by one or another culture may or may not really be rational. For to be truly rational, procedures of justification must lead to the truth, to correspondence to reality, to the intrinsic nature of things (Rorty 1991, 168–69).

* For the realists, the language game of epistemology is not self-standing; it is only the game of *true* knowledge if we can explain how the epistemological criteria assure that a person who knows, is in touch with some objects ‘out there’ (as many philosophers of science claim that natural scientists ‘know’ the basic structure or laws of the universe).
* Rorty in contrast adheres to Wittgenstein’s idea that a game does not have nor need an *external* justification and applies this idea to the notions of knowledge and truth. We say that people know or have true beliefs if they have acquired those beliefs according to the criteria that we as a group accept. That is how Rorty interprets a famous slogan by William James: true is what it is good for us to believe. For us people from the 21st century, you can only claim to have knowledge about the universe, if your beliefs are in accordance with the current standards accepted in (the community of) natural science. Since he rejects the idea that epistemology needs external justification or that truth is correspondence to a non-human reality, Rorty is often accused of relativism. This is reply:

“Relativism” is the traditional epithet applied to pragmatism by realists. Three different views are commonly referred to by this name. The first is the view that every belief is as good as every other. The second is the view that “true” is an equivocal term, having as many meanings as there are procedures of justification. The third is the view that there is nothing to be said about either truth or rationality apart from descriptions of the familiar procedures of justification that a given society-ours-uses in one or another area of inquiry. The pragmatist holds the ethnocentric third view. But he does not hold the self-refuting first view, nor the eccentric second view. He thinks his views are better than the realists, but he does not think that his views correspond to the nature of things. He thinks the very flexibility of the word “true”-the fact that it is merely an expression of commendation-insures its univocity. The term “true,” on his account, means the same in all cultures, just as equally flexible terms like “here,” “there,” “good,” “bad,” “you,” and “me” mean the same in all cultures. But the identity of meaning is, of course, compatible with diversity of reference, and with diversity of procedures for assigning the terms. So he feels free to use the term “true” as a general term of commendation in the same way as his realist opponent does-and in particular to use it to commend his own view.

* + 1. As we see in this quotation, Rorty calls his own view ‘ethnocentrism’. This applies not only to criteria for knowledge or truth, but also to moral or political norms. For example, the norms of democracy and liberalism (as enshrined in a declaration of human rights) that are supposedly accepted in the society Rorty lived in, cannot claim any external justification. They are but the norms accepted in that society, the political ideals endorsed by the group of which Rorty was a part.

So the pragmatist admits that he has no ahistorical standpoint from which to endorse the habits of modern democracies he wishes to praise. These consequences are just what partisans of solidarity expect. But among partisans of objectivity they give rise, once again, to fears of the dilemma formed by ethnocentrism on the one hand and relativism on the other. Either we attach a special privilege to our own community, or we pretend an impossible tolerance for every other group.

I have been arguing that we pragmatists should grasp the ethnocentric horn of this dilemma. We should say that we must, in practice, privilege our own group, even though there can be no noncircular justification for doing so. We must insist that the fact that nothing is immune from criticism does not mean that we have a duty to justify everything. We Western liberal intellectuals should accept the fact that we have to start from where we are, and that this means there are lots of views we simply cannot take seriously […]

[T]he pragmatist, dominated by the desire for solidarity, can only be criticized for taking his own community too seriously. He can only be criticized for ethnocentrism, not for relativism. To be ethnocentric is to divide the human race into the people to whom one must justify one's beliefs and the others. The first group – one’s ethnos – comprises those who share enough of one's beliefs to make fruitful conversation possible. In this sense, everybody is ethnocentric when engaged in actual debate, no matter how much realist rhetoric about objectivity he produces in his study (Rorty 1991, 176–77)

Ethnocentrism does not mean that you are unwilling to stand up for the norms that you adhere to. This is also obvious from the above quotation: ethnocentrism is taking our *own community seriously,* it does not preclude that *we engage in actual debate*. So for Rorty, an ethnocentrist interpretation of liberal democracy does not prevent us from defending these political norms and ideals and even to try to persuade others to accept them as well (and thereby join our group). Ethnocentrism does not preclude a desire for extending the group that lives according to certain norms or values.

* + 1. In later texts, Rorty does not limit his analysis to either claims to knowledge (or science) or political and normative norms (of democracy and liberalism, for instance). He also looks into the fundamental views or ambitions that underlies and give meaning to our personal life – what Rorty calls our ‘final vocabularies’ (our ethical views of what is a good life to lead, our religious views, our ambition to be a good father or a good philosopher, etc.). But the main point about these personal values, ambitions or ideals is similar to ‘Objectivity or Solidarity’; there is no external point of attachment that underwrites these vocabularies. In these later texts, he calls the attitude that is motivated by an acknowledgement of this absence of external points of attachment ‘irony’.

I shall define an “ironist” as someone who fulfills three conditions: (I) She has radical and continuing doubts about the final vocabulary she currently uses, because she has been impressed by other vocabularies, vocabularies taken as final by people or books she has encountered; (2) she realizes that argument phrased in her present vocabulary can neither underwrite nor dissolve these doubts; (3) insofar as she philosophizes about her situation, she does not think that her vocabulary is closer to reality than others, that it is in touch with a power not herself. lronists who are inclined to philosophize see the choice between vocabularies as made neither within a neutral and universal metavocabulary nor by an attempt to fight one's way past appearances to the real, but simply by playing the new off against the old.

* + 1. Rorty’ ironist attitude poses a problem that is similar to the problem that we saw in Goodman’s work in that it concerns the understanding of action. As we have explained, ethnocentrism does not preclude a defense of your moral or political values. If such a defense requires action, the question is how such a commitment to our values, such a call for action in defense of these values is to be reconciled with irony as Rorty understands the term.
* For one thing, not every society allows an ironist attitude. Irony itself demands that certain norms and values are accepted in a society. (Liberal democrats would argue that the norms that irony demands are precisely the norms of liberal democracy).
* For another, the world can be a cruel place; during our history, humans have shown to be capable of all kinds of (physical, psychological, symbolic) cruelty. How can we be simultaneously an ironist fight cruelty? How is irony to be reconciled with a commitment to the struggle against cruelty?
* Rorty tries to reconcile these attitudes by connecting these different attitudes to different spheres of life: The ironist attitude is reserved for the personal sphere, where we give shape to our personality and stylize ourselves as individual. Our commitments to the community is part of our public attitude in our relationship with the other members of that community. The question is whether it is possible to maintain that 1) the ironist attitude is more suitable for aspects of our personality and 2) that this personal attitude of irony does not spill over into our public attachment to social and political norms that reduce cruelty.

## III. Conclusion

1. There can be no doubt that Wittgenstein has fundamentally influenced how we are thinking about philosophy and normativity.
   1. Under the influence of his later works, the very project of modernism has lost its plausibility and attraction. For example, his arguments against a private language and his analysis of following a rule that shows how meaning or significance (and, consequently, everything connected to meaning, such as speaking and talking) derives ultimately from a form of training, implies a rejection of the idea that the subject is completely autonomous. This undermines the hope of radical renewal underlying modernism.
   2. At the same time, his pluralism implied that there is no one point at which that renewal can begin.
2. Yet dispatching this notion of the autonomous subject does not yet answer the question of what it is to be a talking and thinking subject. It does not explain what the relation is between a talking and thinking human being and the life form into which he was introduced through training and thanks to which he is a thinking and talking human being in the first place.
3. As the problems in the work of Goodman and Rorty we briefly indicated, show this is especially striking when we consider how to act (and in this respect, these questions concern important moral and political values such as liberty and equality). However, it points to an issue regarding the very notion of a life form. Life-forms cannot be totally stable: we always meet new people, new things, and new situations. Life-forms can only evolve through the action of the people engaged in the life-form. As Wittgenstein leaves us with a question about action, he leaves unclear how life-forms evolve. The question is how to apply existing beliefs, concepts and attitudes that define a life-from to new people, things and situations. How does a life-form evolve?

# Chapter 5: The coping subject

The Quine-Davidson analysis of knowledge and interpretation

After the Second World War (till 1960 or so) the centre of analytical philosophy was Oxford. Between the two World wars, Oxford had been the home university of R.G. Collingwood (1989-1943), a very interesting and versatile philosopher, but generally philosophy in Oxford had remained aloof from then new developments in Vienna (Carnap and the Vienna Circle) and Cambridge (Moore, Russell, Wittgenstein). After the war, however, philosophy in Oxford developed its own style so that we can now speak of the ‘Oxford Movement’. The three leaders of that movement were Gilbert Ryle (1900-1976), J.L. Austin (1911-1960) and Peter Strawson (1919-2006). The hallmark of this movement was the interest in ordinary language. This interest in ordinary language was in explicit opposition to the attempts at formalizing that we encountered in the previous chapters. Ordinary language and the nuances that we make in ordinary speech is a richer source of insights than logical analysis.

Ordinary language philosophy has indeed proven a rich source of insights. However, in this course we will not further discuss the Oxford movement (we did discuss analyses by Austin and Strawson in Chapter 3). (Those interested in the Oxford movement, can read Chapter 3 in (Baldwin 2001) and Chapter 4 in (Schwartz 2012). The previous all too brief paragraph is based on these chapters). For a more critical discussion see (Rorty 1992)). The reason for skipping the Oxford movement is that, speaking very roughly and disregarding many difference of detail, ordinary language philosophy in a sense continues Wittgenstein’s analysis of language games; in a sense we can view Strawson’s criticism of and alternative for Russell’s ‘On denoting’ as an analysis of the language game of referring and Austin’s criticism of sense=data as an analysis of the game of using the notion of certainty. In this sense, Ordinary language philosophy is not sufficiently far removed from Wittgenstein to help us find answers to the questions we raised at the end of chapter 4.

A different area of English language philosophy that had remained aloof from the rise of analytical philosophy before Second World War were the United States of America. Between the wars, philosophy in the United States was defined by a ‘home-grown’ American tradition; pragmatism as developed by Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914), William James (1942-1910) and John Dewey (1859-1952). The rise of analytical philosophy in the United States was caused by the influx of logical empiricist exiles chased from Europe by Hitler and by the rising influence of W.O Quine (1908-2000). One of the interesting aspects of Quine’s work is that it combines analytical philosophy and the pragmatist tradition (Baldwin 2001, 7–10, 69). However, the problem with the term ‘pragmatism’ is that all philosophers who call themselves pragmatist use that term in their own specific sense.

But Baldwin usefully defines the “pragmatist thesis”: it is “the thesis our actions have a fundamental role in shaping our understanding of the world: the ways in which think about things are ‘instruments’ to assist us in coping with life’s needs” (Baldwin 2001, 9). By emphasising the connection between thinking and action or practice and rejecting ideas of passive thinkers (spectators) who establish an immediate relation with the object of thought, pragmatist philosophy continues important aspects of Wittgenstein’s work. However, by making more explicit how thought is instrumental in coping with life it also offers insights in what it means to cope. In other words, it does not only describe the game and the rules of the game: it also offer some analysis of what it means to play, to participate in a game.

## II. Goodman on induction and prediction

A good example of the pragmatist thesis is the way that Goodman resolves the new riddle of Induction that he himself invented.

[Read Goodman, Nelson. 1983. ‘The New Riddle of Induction’. In *Fact, Fiction and Forecast (1953)*, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, pp. 59–8. Required reading #16 in the Required Readings folder on Toledo].

The question that the introduction of ‘grue’ and ‘bleen’ raises, is to explain why statements with ‘grue’ and ‘bleen’ are unacceptable and those with green and blue are not. (Compare with Carnap in Chapter 3: imagine that Carnap in creating a constructional system with those concepts, why would that be unacceptable).

1. Some immediate or intuitive reasons to reject grue or bleen cannot be upheld.
   1. We might claim to base our preference for green on the knowledge that emeralds will turn out to be not blue (and hence nog grue) after t. But at the present moment we cannot know this (Goodman and Elgin 1988, 14).
   2. Neither can we maintain that ‘green is epistemologically primary, as Goodman show that we can as easily define ‘blue’ and ‘green’ in terms of ‘grue’ and ‘bleen’. So “which pair is basic and which pair is derived is entirely a question of which pair we start with” (Goodman and Elgin 1988, 14).
2. Philosophically more interesting, is that ‘grue’ and ‘bleen’ can also not be rejected on purely syntactical reasons.
   1. Before Goodman introduces these predicates, he discussed with some approval a syntactical definition of what it is for a statement S1 to confirm a statement S2. In explaining this syntactical definition, Goodman uses the notion of a evidence-universe: this is the set of things that are talked about in evidence statements.

The central idea for an improved definition is that, within certain limitations, what is asserted to be true for the narrow universe of the evidence statements is confirmed for the whole universe of discourse. Thus if our evidence is E1(saying that given think b is black) and E2 (saying that a given thing c is not black), neither the hypothesis that all things are black nor the hypothesis that all things are non-black is confirmed; for neither is true for the evidence-universe consisting of b and c.

The evidence universe of evidence statements E1 and E2 consists of b which is black and c which is not black. In other words, in the universe consisting of both b and c (i.e. the evidence universe) neither ‘All things are black’ nor ‘All things are not black’ is true. Neither hypothesis is confirmed by E1 nor by E2 according to this definition, for confirmation means that what is true of the evidence universe (here: b and c) is generalized to the whole universe.

* 1. On this syntactical definition, statements of the form ‘This is an emerald en investigated before t and it is green’ confirms both ‘All emeralds are green’ and ‘All emeralds are grue’. For the evidence-universe exist of all the emeralds investigated before t and the statement that those emeralds are green or grue is generalized to the whole universe of discourse and thus confirms both ‘All emeralds are green’ and ‘All emeralds are grue’.

1. What is then ultimately the reason Goodman gives for preferring ‘green’ and ‘blue’ over ‘grue’and ‘bleen’?
   1. Green and blue are preferred because they are the ‘entrenched’ predicates.

The answer […] is that we must consult the record of past projections of the two predicates. Plainly “green”, as a veteran of earlier and many more projections than "grue'', has the more impressive biography. The predicate "green", we may say, is much better entrenched than the predicate "grue".

We are able to draw this distinction only because we start from the record of past actual projections. We could not draw it starting merely from hypotheses and the evidence for them. For every time that “green” either was actually projected or-so to speak-could have been projected, “grue” also might have been projected; that is to say, whenever such a hypothesis as “All so-and-sos are green” was supported, unviolated, and unexhausted, the hypothesis “All so-and-sos are grue” was likewise supported, unviolated, and unexhausted.. […]. The significant difference appears only if we consider just those occasions when each predicate was actually projected (Goodman 1983, 94–95).

A statement of the form ‘All so-and sos are A’ is *supported* when, at a given time, there are some positive cases (some so-and-so are discovered to be A), it is *unviolated* when there are no negative cases (no so-and-so are yet discovered to be not A). It is *unexhausted* when there are some undetermined cases (of some so-and- sos, it has not it is not yet determined whether they are A (cf. (Goodman 1983, 90). It is clear that when ‘All emeralds are green’ is supported, unviolated and unexhausted, so is ‘All emeralds are grue’. In other words, the difference between the two kinds of statements is not that the one has more objective justification in the evidence than the other. The only difference is the fact that one kind of predicate have *in fact* been used (the “occasions when each predicate was *actually* projected”).

What underwrites our preference for one predicate, one kind of statements (projections) is the history of what predicates, or statements were used.

“Although “green” and “grue” accord equally with the evidence, we have long been accustomed to projection “green”, while projection” of “grue” is nearly unprecedented”. Projection of “green” and familiar coordinate color predicates overrides introduction of novel color predicates like “grue”; (Goodman and Elgin 1988, 14)

A predicate may not be accepted when it competes with predicates that are firmly entrenched and the set of entrenched predicates itself changes through time. It follows that a predicate’s chances of being accepted depends on the predicates that are entrenched at a given moment in time. The predicate that is unacceptable at one moment in time may become acceptable at a different moment. Acceptability of projectible predicates depends on the situation at a precise historical moment.

Incidentally, Goodman’s solution to his riddle of induction is a good illustration of the pragmatist thesis: preference for a set of predicates does not derive from support in the evidence; it is a matter of finding ways at a particular moment in history to cope with new evidence given the available conceptual baggage that we carry:

This does not mean, […], that right versions can be arrived at casually, or that worlds, are built from scratch. We start, on any occasion, with some old version or world, that we have on hand and that we are tuck with until we have the determination and skill to remake it into a new one. […]. Worldmaking begins with one version and ends with another (Goodman 1978, 97).

## III. Quine on the Web of Belief

[Read Quine, W.V., and J.S. Ullian. 1970. *The Web of Belief*. New York: Random House, Ch. I-IV and VIII, pp. 3-49, 96-107. Required reading #17 in the Required Readings folder on Toledo].

The interesting points of this account of belief, knowledge and science are the following

### Historical dimension: knowledge as the result of what we do over time

In explaining what knowledge is, Quine does not refer to a special object that we can grasp in order to obtain knowledge. Nor does he enumerate certain conditions a belief has to fulfil in order to qualify as knowledge (as in the definition ‘knowledge is justified true belief’). Quine describes 1) how beliefs *change* through time (as the title of Chapter 1 indicates), and 2) what we should *do* when we are to change our beliefs in a proper way.

Often in assessing beliefs we do best to assess several in combination. A very accomplished mechanic might be able to tell something about an automobile’s engine by examining its parts one by one, each in complete isolation from the others, but it would surely serve his purpose better to see the engine as a whole with all the parts functioning together. So with what we believe. It is in the light of the full body of our beliefs that candidates gain acceptance or rejection; any independent merits of a candidate tend to be less decisive. To see why this should be, recall the characteristic occasion for questioning beliefs. It was the situation where a new belief, up for adoption, conflicts somehow with the present body of beliefs as a body. Now when a set of beliefs is inconsistent, at least one of the beliefs must be rejected as false; but a question may remain open as to which to reject. Evidence must then be assessed, with a view to rejecting the least firmly supported of the conflicting beliefs. But even that belief will have had some supporting evidence, however shaky; so in rejecting it we may have to reject also some tenuous belief that had helped to support it. Revision may thus progress downward as the evidence thins out (Quine and Ullian 1978, 16–17).

(Note the analogy between knower and mechanic, i.e somebody who know how to cope with problems that arise with an engine).

### Empiricism but with an holist twist

* 1. Quine is explicitly about the fact that knowledge and science is based on observation sentences

Thus the ultimate evidence that our whole system of beliefs has to answer up to consists strictly of our own direct observations—including our observations of our notes and of other people's reports. Naturally, we leave many points unchecked. Lore is handed down from our forebears. Such actual evidence as any one of us does have, however, is in the end the direct evidence of the senses. Likewise such evidence as there is and ever was, collectively, for the whole overwhelming edifice of science, has consisted only in the direct evidence of many peoples’ senses (Quine and Ullian 1978, 21–22).

So we all contribute, with our respective observations, to the knowledge that we all share. We find here an element that at once makes science hard and makes it possible. It is hard because it must build a coherent system from the diverse evidence gleaned and reported by people of different times, places, cultures, and interests; it is possible because there is thus so much to draw on. Are observation sentences infallible? Nearly, if we set aside those offered disingenuously and those uttered by speakers who have not quite learned the language, (Quine and Ullian 1978, 29)

* 1. But this is an empiricism that rejects the idea of an immediate relation between the knowing subject and the known world

The world with its quarks and chromosomes, its distant lands and spiral nebulae, is like a vast computer in a black box, forever sealed except for its input and output registers. These we directly observe, and in the light of them, we speculate on the structure of the machine, the universe. Thus it is that we think up the quarks and chromosomes, the distant lands and the nebulae; they would account for the observable data (Quine and Ullian 1978, 22).

* 1. Moreover, it is a *holist* form of empiricism. (‘Holism’ derives from a Greek word that means ‘whole’; holism refers to an approach that (of study or treatment) that is concerned with wholes or with complete systems).
     1. 1

When an observation turns out unexpectedly, we may try modifying our theory of that structure at one or another point. When an observation shows that a system of beliefs must be overhauled, it leaves us to choose which of those interlocking beliefs to revise; this important fact has come up repeatedly. But note now that the observation sentence itself, the sentence that reports or predicts a present or imminent observation, is peculiar on this score. It does face the tribunal singly, in the usual case, and simply stands or falls with the observation that it reports or predicts. And, standing or falling, it sustains or lets down the system of beliefs that implied it (Quine and Ullian 1978, 22).

* + 1. Even more interesting is the fact that Quine’s holism includes observation sentences. (This is of course encouraged by his rejection of the distinction between analytic and synthetic statements). If an observations sentence contradicts a body of beliefs, we feel that we should revise the beliefs, but in the case of a well-established set of beliefs (say, a scientific theory), revision may go in the opposite direction and we bracket recalcitrant observations.

[…] A trace of fallibility, indeed, there is. Normally, observation is the tug that tows the ship of theory; but in an extreme case the theory pulls so hard that observation yields. It can happen that a theory has long gone unchallenged, neatly conforming to countless relevant observations on every hand, and that now one observation conflicts with it. Chances are that we will waive the one wayward observation […]

It is only a strong and long unchallenged theory that will occasionally resist the adverse testimony of a remembered or recorded or reported observation. In such an extremity we may attribute the wayward evidence to unexplained interference, even to hallucination. If such alleged cases of hallucination tend to cluster in a few persons, who may then be seen as prone to hallucination, so much the better for our scientific conscience. There is then hope of accommodating the very waywardness of those wayward observations in a theory too, a theory of psychopathology. Law may thus be sought in the apparent breaches of law. Even when observations persist in conflicting with a theory, the theory will not necessarily be abandoned forthwith. It will linger until a plausible substitute is found; the conflicting observations will stand unexplained, and the sense of crisis will mount. […]

There are some points at which, without deliberate consideration of theories, all of us find it second nature to edit observation. We learn to take it that sticks appearing bent while partially immersed in water should in fact be judged straight. We learn not to suppose that the moon is larger when near the horizon than when higher in the sky. When the colors before us begin to vibrate, we do not imagine that the properties of light have changed. But in all these examples, again, we are at pains in the end to accommodate the waywardness of the observations in a theory too. The illusion of the immersed sticks is covered by a physical theory of refraction; the illusion of the low moon is coped with by some psychological hypotheses; and a general visual disruption is apt to set us speculating about something we ate or drank. Observations thus stubbornly retain their primacy. They remain the boundary conditions of our body of beliefs (Quine and Ullian 1978, 29–32)

* 1. As Quine explicitly mentions in the last quotation what we revise in the face of recalcitrant observations is not clear automatically (e.g. purely on the basis of logical considerations); it is a matter of deliberation (“deliberative consideration”). As Quine explains in Chapter VI, a decision about how to revise, that is what hypotheses to accept or reject is based on certain properties or virtues that an hypothesis may enjoy: conservatism, modesty, simplicity, generality, refutability. Two aspects of the virtues are particularly noteworthy
     1. The virtues are properties that 1) hypotheses may enjoy in varying degrees (p. 66), 2) that do not pull in the same direction (one hypothesis may have more of one virtue and less of another, while with a second hypotheses things may be the other way round) and may therefore be mutually conflicting (p.74) and 3) that sometimes are a matter of subjectivity (p. 71). In deciding how to revise our beliefs according to these virtues, we can come to different conclusions.
     2. None of these virtue are in themselves guarantees that or are underwritten by the assurance that hypotheses that enjoy them in a large degree are more true or more justified. On the contrary, generality and refutability increase the probability that a hypothesis will be refuted one day. And why would we assume that the universe is simple so that a simple theory would somehow correspond better to the structure of the universe? These virtues are pragmatic considerations that help us cope with the observations that we have and navigate through the universe. In this sense, Quine’s account of the virtues and of revision or change of beliefs instantiates the pragmatist thesis: the ways in which think about things help us to coping with life’s needs
  2. Quine’s philosophy and in particular his empiricism was developed in a life-long discussion with Carnap. Nevertheless, it will be clear that Quine’s empiricism differs greatly from the empiricism of Carnap’s *The Logical Structure.*  His holism implies that Quine rejects Carnap’s reductionism: the idea that we can translate any cognitively significant statement in terms of experiences . That his holism includes observation statements is just another way of expressing, Quine’s rejection of the analytic-synthetic distinction and this leads. In the famous text where Quine criticizes the analytic-synthetic distinction, ‘Two Dogmas of Empiricism’, Quine draws the ontological conclusions of his pragmatist brand of empiricism (a conclusion that is remarkably similar to the Best Account-argument proposed by Taylor and McDowell):

As an empiricist I continue to think of the conceptual scheme of science as a tool, ultimately, for predicting future experience in the light of past experience. Physical objects are conceptually imported into the situation as convenient intermediaries -- not by definition in terms of experience, but simply as irreducible posits comparable, epistemologically, to the gods of Homer. Let me interject that for my part I do, qua lay physicist, believe in physical objects and not in Homer's gods; and I consider it a scientific error to believe otherwise. But in point of epistemological footing the physical objects and the gods differ only in degree and not in kind. Both sorts of entities enter our conception only as cultural posits. The myth of physical objects is epistemologically superior to most in that it has proved more efficacious than other myths as a device for working a manageable structure into the flux of experience (Quine 1963, \*).

### Empiricism and communication

Quine’s empiricism differs from earlier versions of empiricism because of the holistic way it conceives of the relation between observation and belief, hypothesis, theory and science. Another important difference concerns how it conceives of observation. For the more or less fallible bottom of science are observations *sentences* that *we* or *the community agree upon*.

For philosophical purposes the notion of observation, and of observation sentence, needs to be taken with an unimaginative literalness. A straightforward criterion to the purpose is already before us: that all reasonably competent speakers of the language be disposed, if asked, to assent to the sentence under the same stimulations of their sensory surfaces. On this criterion “That’s a condenser” simply does not count as an observation sentence, trained eye notwithstanding. Naturally the experts, being reasonable, will stop pressing for further evidence anyway as soon as they can agree. They can agree that it is a condenser, so they stop there, rather than press on compulsively to genuine observation sentences in our sense of the term; but they always could press on. If they care to use the term “observation” for their intermediate stopping point, let us not dispute about the term. They might be said to be simply narrowing the category of “competent speakers of the language” to their specialized group (Quine and Ullian 1978, 33).

The idea is that when different people under when our sensory surface are subjected to the same stimulations (for instance our eyes are subjected to stimulations caused by a wired box) we would agree to answer ‘yes’ to the question ‘is there a wired box’. In other words, to understand the foundations of knowledge and science, we have to understand observations sentences that is sentences that we agree upon in “under the same stimulations of their sensory surfaces”. To understand empiricism, we have to understand language and communication

## III. Davidson: Interpretation and Truth

In *Word and Object* (1960), Quine has himself developed an interesting philosophy of language. However, as Quine conceded, that philosophy of language has been systematized, elaborated and corrected by Donald Davidson (1917-2003). Davidson’s theory of language is important in order to understand completely Quine’s account of knowledge.

However, Davidson’s work is important in its own right. For in a sense, Davidsons gives a pragmatist account of language in the sense we defined above. As a matter of fact, philosophers such as Quine and Davidsons but also critics of Quine and Davidson, such as Michael Dummett (1925-2011) and McDowell (1942 - ) do not aim to give an account or a definition of (linguistic) meaning. In order to understand what (the) meaning (of a sentence) is, It suffices to describe how a language user can come to know the meaning of a sentence (de Pater 1990, 21). And to give such a description, these philosophers attempt answer the question what an interpreter must know in order to be able to understand a speaker of a language L. (Davidson 1984b, 125, 215, 224; Dummett 1975, 99, 1976, 69). If we have a clear a plausible description of a theory that an interpreter can use to interpret (a sentence in a language L), we have an account of what (the) meaning (of the sentence) is. A theory of meaning is a theory of understanding (Dummett 1976, 99; McDowell 1977, 165–66, 1980, 135).

(An important correction that Davidson introduced in Quine’s account is that the basis is not stimulations of sensory surfaces. Stimulation of sensory surfaces can be caused by the object, such as a wired box, but also by an evil genius playing with our sense organs. Appealing to stimulations leaves the account open to all kinds of sceptical challenges. In Davidson, the basis will be agreement on objects in the world, not stimulations caused by objects)

### Radical interpretation

We have a speaker of a language different from our own, Kurt, who utters sound ‘Es regnet’ and we know that the sounds he makes are ‘intentional and linguistic’, i.e. he wants to say something. Davidson ask what knowledge would serve for interpretation (p. 126). What could we know to enable to say what his words, on that occasion, meant? (We will later explain Davidson’s reason to focus on *radical* interpretation).

* 1. Before answering this question, Davidson, consecutively discards possible answers as either incomplete or unhelpful.
     1. What is required is “knowledge of what each meaningful expression [or word] means”. (126).
        + This is a first step since it suggest that we must be able “to use a machinery of words and expressions”. We must be able to speak *about* the language we are trying to understand and we must be able to structure the language and divide it up in words and expressions.
        + Davidson explains the importance of realizing the need for structure and words on p. 127: “words are finite in number while sentences are not, and yet each sentence is no more than a concatenation of words: this oﬀers the chance of a theory that interprets each of an infinity of sentences using only finite resources”.
     2. We must know the entity, the meaning, corresponding to each meaningful expression (Compare for Frege, the words of a language express a certain concept that is the meaning of those words). But that does not explain how we might find that supposed entity)
     3. We can agree that “interpretable speeches are nothing but […] actions performed with assorted non-linguistic intentions (to warn, control, amuse, distract, insult), and these actions are in turn nothing but (identical with) intentional movements of the lips and larynx”. In this sense, we have nothing more to go on during interpretation our sole evidential base for interpretation are these non-linguistic movements or goings-on. But this correct observation does not does tell us how that evidence is related to what we try to understand.
     4. Causal theories (Ogden and Richards or Morris) that attempted to analyse the meaning of sentences [or words], taken one at a time, based on behaviouristic data (for instance, information that Kurt always utters ‘Es regnet’ when it rains, have not worked for more complicated sentences.
     5. If we had as evidence an account of the complex and delicately discriminated intentions with which the sentence is typically uttered, then we might understand its meaning. If we would somehow know that Kurt wants to warn us for the weather and advise us to put on appropriate clothing in circumstances, we might have some clue about what his words mean. But Davidson sees two problems:
        + How [can] such an approach [… deal with the structural, recursive feature of language that is essential to explaining how new sentences can be understood. (even if we know that by saying ‘es regnet’ the last time, Kurt wanted to warn us for the weather, how does that help us to understand a more complex sentences such as “Ich freue mich, wenn es regnet”).
        + The central difficulty is that we cannot hope to interpret an agent’s (subtly modulated) intentions and beliefs independently of interpreting his speech. (Maybe we can understand that Kurt wants to warn us for the weather, when we are standing in the rain, but will we understand when what he actually wants to explain his that the river down the valley might flood if the rain continues?)
     6. The last rejected possibility is “a method of translation, from the language to be interpreted into the language of the interpreter”
        + A translation theory would indeed be useful for an interpreter: “someone who understands the theory can no doubt use the translation manual to interpret alien utterances”.
        + Such a translation theory, even if useful to an interpreter would not answer our question what does the interpreter have to know to understand Kurt’s words. For the interpreter “brings to bear two things he knows and that the theory does not state: the fact that the subject language is his own, and his knowledge of how to interpret utterances in his own language” (129). This is obvious if you are provided with a translation theory into a language that you cannot understand, e.g. ‘Kurts words ‘es regnet’ translates into the Dutch sentence ‘het regent’.
  2. As a result of the discussion of these unsuitable answers to the question, we can identify two general requirements on a theory of interpretation
     1. “The interpreter must be able to understand any of the infinity of sentences the speaker might utter”. What an interpreter must know is something that can be “put it in finite form”
     2. The theory of interpretation “can be supported or verifed by evidence plausibly available to an interpreter” […]: the evidence must be of a sort that would be available to someone who does not already know how to interpret utterances the theory is designed to cover: it must be evidence that can be stated without essential use of such linguistic concepts as meaning, interpretation, synonymy, and the like” (128).
  3. According to Davidson the answer to his question is: a theory of truth in Tarski’s style.

[Characteristic of] a theory of truth in Tarski's style is that it entails, for every sentence s of the object language, a sentence of the form: *s* is true (in the object language) if and only if p. Instances of the form (which we shall call T-sentences) are obtained by replacing '*s*' by a canonical description of *s*, and '*p*' by a translation of *s*.

We discussed Tarski's convention in Chapter 2. Convention T says that an adequate definition of truth must entail for each sentence the following formula: 'p' is true if and only if p. What I did not mention there is that Tarski presented his own definition of truth. This is what Davidson calls a Tarskian theory of truth. Such a theory of truth is a complicated affair, but we can give an impression of it on the following lines. A Tarski-style theory of truth for (a tiny fragment of) Latin will contain the following axioms

(A1)    ‘Kanninchen refers to a rabbit

(A2)    An object x satisfies '… sitzt' if and only if x is sitting.

(A3)    An object x satisfies  ‘Hier …’ if and only if x is near the speaker.

From these axioms and Tarski's definition of truth Convention (T) follows as a theorem from the action.

(T1)    ‘Hier sitzt ein Kanninchen’ is true if and only if a sitting rabbit is near the speaker.

If such a theory is possible, the axioms would be as numerous as the words in the language and therefore finite (in this sense a Tarski-style theory of truth meets the first requirement), but the theory would yield an interpretation for the infinite number of sentences that we can form by combining those words.

* 1. About Davidson’s suggestion that a Tarski style theory of truth is sufficient to be able to interpret the utterances of a speaker, three questions remain. The *first* one is whether such a theory is possible. As I mentioned, my ‘axioms’ (A1) or (A2) are extremely simple, but axioms are required for all words in a language (including indexicals, tense etc.)
  2. The *second* question is how we can test a Tarski-style theory of truth; what evidence do we rely on to build the theory and to test a theory once it is available. Obviously, this must be evidence that cannot itself presuppose that we understand the language.
     1. “The evidence cannot consist in detailed descriptions of the speaker's beliefs and intentions, since attributions of attitudes, at least where subtlety is required, demand a theory that must rest on much the same evidence as interpretation” (133).
     2. “A good place to begin is with the attitude of holding a sentence true, of accepting it as true. This is, of course, a belief, but it is a single attitude applicable to all sentences, and so does not ask us to be able to make finely discriminated distinctions among beliefs.”
     3. “How can this evidence be used to support a theory of truth? On the one hand, we have T-sentences, in the form:

(T) 'Es regnet' is true-in-German when spoken by x at time t if and only if it is raining near x at t.

On the other hand, we have the evidence, in the form:

(E) Kurt belongs to the German speech community and Kurt holds true 'Es regnet' on Saturday at noon and it is raining near Kurt on Saturday at noon.

We should, I think, consider (E) as evidence that (T) is true. Since (T) is a universally quantified conditional, the first step would be to gather more evidence to support the claim that:

(GE) (x)(t) (if x belongs to the German speech community then (x holds true 'Es regnet' at t if and only if it is raining near x at t)).

* + 1. As Davidson remarks (136), “the obvious objection is that Kurt […] may be wrong [or may want to deceive us] about whether it is raining near him.

The answer to this objection is given in the first 2 paragraphs of p. 137. Interpretation requires a special method:

This is accomplished by assigning truth conditions to alien sentences that make native speakers right when plausibly possible, according, of course, to our own view of what is right. What justifies the procedure is the fact that disagreement and agreement alike are intelligible only against a background of massive agreement. Applied to language, this principle reads : the more sentences we conspire to accept or reject (whether or not through a medium of interpretation), the better we understand the rest, whether or not we agree about them.

The methodological advice to interpret in a way that optimizes agreement should not be conceived as resting on a charitable assumption about human intelligence that might turn out to be false. If we cannot find a way to interpret the utterances and other behaviour of a creature as revealing a set of beliefs largely consistent and true by our own standard s, we have no reason to count that creature as rational , as having beliefs, or as saying anything (Davidson 1984d, 137)

How this method of interpretation may go is explained in (a little) more detail in the last paragraph of p. 136

* + 1. This has consequences for how we look upon our theory and upon (E) and (GE): “this is of course a reason for not taking (E) as conclusive evidence for (GE) or for (T); and a reason not to expect generalizations like (GE) to be more than generally true. The method is rather one of getting a best ft. We want a theory that satisfes the formal constraints on a theory of truth, and that maximizes agreement, in the sense of making Kurt (and others) right, as far as we can tell, as ofen as possible
  1. In what sense does a Tarski style theory of truth interpret the sentences for the language it is a theory of.
     1. A sentence does not ‘give’ the meaning of the sentence it concerns: it only (through the if and only if) establishes connections between truth-values of the objectlanguage sentences and the metalanguage sentence.
     2. If truth-values are all that matters, the theory may as well yield T-sentences such as this one ‘Schnee ist weiss’ is indeed true if and only if ‘snow is white’ but also if and only if ‘Grass is green’ or ‘2+2 =4’. For the truth-value of ‘Snow is white’, ‘Grass is green’ or ‘2+2=4’ are identical.
     3. However, Davidson beliefs that such unwanted results will not be forthcoming. For the following reasons
        + A truth theory does not only give the T-sentences it also gives the axioms and explains how the T-sentence derives from the axioms (“the canonical proof of the T-sentences, 138). No plausible axiom would lead to the deviant T-sentence.
        + Moreover, suppose we add an axiom (A4) to the list above :

(A4) ‘Hund’ refers to a dog.

Tnat new axiom will suggest how to interpret ‘Hier sitzt ein Hund’ and explain the connection between ‘Hier sitzt ein Hund’ and ‘Hier sitzt ein Kaninchenn’. In other words by means of the axioms and the proofs of the theorem we “the place of the sentence in the language as a whole, we would know the role of each signifcant part of the sentence, and we would know about the logical connections between this sentence and others” (139).

* + - * But the main support for a theory is that “the totality of T-sentences should optimally fit evidence about sentences held true by native speakers”. If the the interpretations suggested by the theory of the sentences held true by Kurt helps to explain what Kurt says and does, we have no reason to doubt the theory. The theory is correct to the extent that the theory enables us to make sense of what a language user says or does.
    1. These are reason for expecting that no theory will be acceptable that yields deviant T-sentences such as ‘Schnee ist weiss’ if and only if ‘Grass is green’ or ‘2+2 =4’. However, as Davidson remarks, “[i]t is not likely, given the ﬂexible nature of the constraints, that all acceptable theories will be identical” (139).

### All interpretation is radical interpretation

What we summarized in the previous section, is Davidson’s theoretical account of how an interpreter could discover the meaning of sentences (spoken by Kurt) even when the interpreter has no previous information about the language. (Obviously, this is not an account of how an interpreter actually comes to understand a speaker). According to the pragmatist thesis, such an account of what an interpreter does is sufficient to resolve many philosophical questions about language.

* 1. Even if we accept the pragmatist approach to philosophy, this may seem a puzzling claim: isn’t radical interpretation a pretty marginal aspect of language use and interpretation? Not according to Davidson; for him “all understanding of the speech of another involves radical interpretation” (Davidson 1984e, 125). An account of radical interpretation is an especially stark account of what happens in interpretation. For this very controversial claim, Davidson offers the following arguments:
     1. Of course, we speak much as our neighbours do, as Davidson writes somewhere. But the question is how do you know that: “how can it be determined that the language is the same? Speakers of the same language can go on the assumption that for them the same expressions are to be interpreted in the same way, but this does not indicate what justifies the assumption” (Davidson 1984e, 125).
     2. As Davidson explains at the beginning of ‘A Nice Derangement’ language use deviating from what is standard or normal use in a language (intentional or unintentional malapropisms, play on words, puns, incomplete or garbled utterance of sentences, slips of the tongue, or new idiolects) is “ubiquitous”. In addition to such ‘deviant’ language use, speakers of ‘the same language’ add new proper names to their language.
        + What is common to these phenomena is that they introduces utterances that not covered by prior learning. Nevertheless “the hearer has no trouble understanding the speaker in the way the speaker intends” (Davidson 1986, 433–34).
        + Precisely this absence of prior learning distinguishes the phenomena from other examples of unruly language use. For example it may be quite unlikely that we will ever devise clear rules for disambiguation or for interpreting word order (the ‘they got a child and got married’- example), or for spelling out what is implied by the use of ‘but’ instead of ‘and’. An interpreter’s ability to understand can in these cases be understood by prior learning, if not the learning of rules at least the acquiring of skills (of disambiguation, interpreting word order, etc.)
        + Precisely because the phenomena that interest Davidson, cannot be ‘covered’ by prior learning, understanding them is similar to radical interpretation.
     3. I called language use that cannot be covered by prior learning deviant, but that is not quite correct.
        + For one thing, as Davidson said it is ubiquitous.
        + For another, it follows from what is essential to language. This is clearly expressed by what Davidson calls the principle of the autonomy of meaning: ‘it is not an accidental feature of language that the ulterior purpose of an utterance and its literal meaning are independent, in the sense that the latter cannot be derived from the former: it is of the essence of language” (Davidson 1984a, 274, 1984f, 165, 1984c, 164)
        + The principle of the autonomy of meaning expresses the unruly dimension of language, the very fact that we can play with language. This unruly dimension means that we can never just assume that the speaker is in fact using language in an ordinary, non-playful way.
        + In other words, rather than seeing this unruly dimension of language as a deplorable dimension of natural language to be corrected by an artificial language of formal logic as Frege thought, we must take the unruly role as our point of departure for understanding other issues of philosophy, such as question of the meaning of normativity.
  2. Focusing on these phenomena leads to an account of interpretation that is quite similar but at the same time more complex as the account of radical interpretation as we described it above:
     1. Obviously, if we accept Davidson’s account of interpretation, our idea of speaking changes:

The speaker wants to be understood so he utters words he believes can and will be interpreted in a certain way'. In order to judge how he will be interpreted, he forms, or uses, a picture of the interpreter's readiness to interpret along certain lines. Central to this picture is what the speaker believes is the starting theory of interpretation the interpreter has for him. The speaker does not necessarily speak in such a way as to prompt the interpreter to apply this prior theory; he may deliberately dispose the interpreter to modify his prior theory. But the speaker's view of the interpreter's prior theory is not irrelevant to what he says, nor to what he means by his words; it is an important part of what he has to go on if he wants to be understood, (Davidson 1986, 444).

* + 1. The current account is more complex than the account under 1. in invoking *two* theories of interpretation but does not deviate from it in an crucial way.

Here is a highly simplified and idealized proposal about what goes on. An interpreter has, at any moment of a speech transaction, what I persist in calling a theory. (I call it a theory, as remarked before, only because a description of the interpreter's competence requires a recursive account.) I assume that the interpreter's theory has been adjusted to the evidence so far available to him: knowledge of the character, dress, role, sex, of the speaker, and whatever else has been gained by observing the speaker's behaviour, linguistic or otherwise. As the speaker speaks his piece the interpreter alters his theory, entering hypotheses about new names, altering the interpretation of familiar predicates, and revising past interpretations of particular utterances in the light of new evidence, (Davidson 1986, 441).

### Holism and Indeterminacy

As is obvious from the three papers, what makes interpretation so complex are two aspects of the mental (our attitudes or thoughts).

* 1. The first is the holism of the mental:

[Attitudes or thoughts, such as beliefs and desires] cannot exist in isolation. Individual beliefs, intentions, doubts and desires owe their identities in part to their position in a large network of further attitudes: the character of a given belief depends on endless other beliefs; beliefs have the role they do because of their relations to desires and intentions and perceptions. These relations among the attitudes are essentially logical: the content of an attitude cannot be divorced from what it entails and what is entailed by it. This places a normative constraint on the correct attribution of attitudes: since an attitude is in part identified by its logical relations, the pattern of attitudes in an individual must exhibit a large degree of coherence. (Davidson 1994, 231–32).

* 1. The other is the interdependency between the mental (attitudes or thoughts) and language: to understand a language is to know what thoughts speakers are trying to express. In order to know speakers’ thoughts in any detail requires that we understand what they are saying. This interdependence is clearly characterized in ‘Radical Interpretation’:

[A] speaker holds a sentence to be true because of what the sentence (in his language) means, and because of what he believes. Knowing that he holds the sentence to be true, and knowing the meaning, we can infer his belief; given enough information about his beliefs, we could perhaps infer the meaning. But radical interpretation should rest on evidence that does not assume knowledge of meanings or detailed knowledge of beliefs (Davidson 1984e, 134–35).

* 1. The result is that a form of indeterminacy affects our interpretation and, consequently, interaction with other people.
     1. What do we expect from an acceptable theory of truth serving as a theory of interpretation? We expect it to make sense of what the speaker is saying. As Davidson emphasizes at the end of ‘Radical Interpretation’, it is possible that there are different such acceptable theories:

“When all the evidence is in, there will remain, as Quine has emphasized, the trade-offs between the beliefs we attribute to a speaker and the interpretations we give his words. But the resulting indeterminacy cannot be so great but that any theory that passes the tests will serve to yield interpretations, (Davidson 1984e, 139).

* + - * Indeterminacy of meaning can be defined in this way: There are several adequate theories of truth or interpretation in language L for a language L’ which are such that the different interpretations into L of any given sentence of L’ always have the same truth-value, but in some cases have different intuitive meanings. (Compare (Montminy 1997, 342)).
      * Indeterminacy of meaning is a consequence of the interdependence of the mental and the linguistic. For the result of this interdependence may be that an interpreter has a choice between different interpreations. Imagine an anthropologist who studies a culture where members of one group (say those with blue eyes) always wear a particular tattoo and no one else ever wears a tattoo. The anthropologist never sees anyone with blue eyes without tattoo and no one without blue eyes with tattoo. In that case, it may be that he cannot distinguish between ‘being blue-eyed’ or ‘wearing a tattoo’. Interpreting certain sentences he may have a choice; a sentence may be translated as ‘Anne has blue eyes’ or as ‘Anne wears a tattoo’
    1. From indeterminacy of meaning follows indeterminacy of truth.
       - Indeterminacy of truth can be defined thus: There are several adequate theories of truth or interpretation in language L for a language L’ which are such, that are such that taken in pairs, respectively correlate certain sentences of L’ with sentences of L having different truth-values (Compare (Montminy 1997, 342)).
       - Imagine that you walk through Leuven with a friend. Walking towards Sint Pieter’s church, she exclaims ‘What a beautiful cathedral’. Then you have a choice, either you interpret her word ‘cathedral’ as ‘church that is the official seat of a diocesan bishop’ and what she is saying is wrong; you interpret her as having a false belief. Alternatively, you decide that ‘cathedral’ has for her a different meaning (say, ‘big old church’) and then you interpret her as having a true belief, but using the word ‘cathedral’ differently from you yourself.
       - In other words, to some extent, the interpreter has a choice: you can interpret a speaker in such a way as to establish either that there is a disagreement between interpreter and speaker (attaching different truth values to the speaker’s sentence) or that there is a misunderstanding (there is not one sentences with different truth values, but two sentences sounding alike but with different meanings to which they attribute identical truth values).

### Intersubjective and objective

* 1. By focusing on interpretation and communication, we have been analysing the relations between thinking and talking subjects.
     1. We may say that we have been following the insight of Wittgenstein that to understand talking and thinking we must see that there is no such thing as a private language. More generally, that we are subjects because of our relations with others.
  2. Wittgenstein understands this non-private aspect of language and thought in terms of rule following and argues that the notion of rule following us to the role of the community, for instance a community of language users.
     1. Davidson’s claim that all interpret is radical interpretation cannot but have implications for rule-following and the role of communities.
        + For instance, on Wittgenstein’s view what a community shares is (implicit) knowledge of the rules. What is shared according to Davidson’s account of radical interpretation?

[…] Stated more broadly now, the problem is this: what interpreter and speaker share, to the extent that communication succeeds, is not learned and so is not a language governed by rules or conventions known to speaker and interpreter in advance; but what the speaker and interpreter know in advance is not (necessarily) shared, and so is not a language governed by shared rules or conventions. What is shared is, as before, the passing theory; what is given in advance is the prior theory, or anything on which it may in turn be based.

[…] What two people need, if they are to understand one another through speech, is the ability to converge on passing theories from utterance to utterance. Their starting points, however far back we want to take them, will usually be very different […]

Perhaps we can give content to the idea of two people ‘having the same language by saying that they tend to converge on passing theories, degree or relative frequency of convergence would then be a measure of similarity of language. What use can we find, however, for the concept of a language? We could hold that any theory on which a speaker and interpreter converge is a language; but then there would be a new language for every unexpected turn in the conversation, and languages could not be learned and no one would want to master most of them, (Davidson 1986, 445).

The idea of [a]“learnable, [a] common core of consistent behaviour, [a] grammar or rules” shared by all people knowing a language loses its significance, (Davidson 1986, 446–47)? Consequently, the claim that language presupposes community, that “a speaker go on in the same way as others do--that to mean something in speaking, one must mean the same thing by the same words as others do” has no place in Davidson’s view of language learning, (Davidson 1992, 260).

* 1. Nevertheless, by abandoning Wittgensteinian ideas about rule following we have not abandoned his claim about the non-private social dimension of language:
     1. For instance, what is correct interpretation? If communication is essential to language, language is social

If the speech behavior of others does not provide the norm for the speaker, what can? The answer is that the intention of the speaker to be interpreted in a certain way provides the norm; the speaker falls short of his intention if he fails to speak in such a way as to be understood as he intended. Under usual circumstances, a speaker knows he is most apt to be understood if he speaks as his listeners would, and so he will intend to speak as he thinks they would. He will then fail in one of his intentions if he does not speak as others do. This simple fact helps explain, I think, why many philosophers have tied the meaning of a speaker's utterances to what others mean by the same words (whether "others" refers to a linguistic community, "experts," or an elite of one sort or another). On my account, this tie is neither essential nor direct; it comes into play only when the speaker intends to be interpreted as (certain) others would be. When this intention is absent, the correct understanding of a speaker is unaffected by usage beyond the intended reach of his voice. (A failed intention to speak "correctly," unless it foils the intention to be interpreted in a certain way, does not matter to what the speaker means, (Davidson 1992, 261, cf. 258-260).

* + 1. The same conclusion follow if we consider not interpretation but learning a language. Davidson describes “a primitive learning situation” where “[s]ome creature is taught, or anyway learns, to respond in a specific way to a stimulus or a class of stimuli” (Davidson 1992, 262). Analysing this situation reveals it essential social or intersubjective nature of language

First, if someone is the speaker of a language, there must be another sentient being whose innate similarity responses are sufficiently like his own to provide an answer to the question of what thee stimulus is to which the speaker is responding. And second, if the speakers responses are linguistic, they must be knowingly and intentionally responses to specific stimuli. The speaker must have the concept of the stimulus – of the bell or of tables. Since the bell or a table is identified only by the intersection of two (or more) sets of similarity responses (lines of thought, we might almost say), to have the concept of a table or a bell is to recognize the existence of a triangle, one apex of which is oneself, another a creature similar to oneself, and the third an object (table or bell) located in a space thus made common.

The only way of knowing that the second apex of the triangle – -the second creature or person – is reacting to the same object as oneself is to know that the other person has the same object in mind. But then the second person must also know that the first person constitutes an apex of the same tringle, another apex of which the second person occupies. For two people to know of each other that they are so that their thoughts are so related, requires that they be in communication. Each of them must speak to the other and be understood by the other. They do not, as I said, have to mean the same thing by the same words but they must each be an interpreter of the other.

[…]

This argument shows that there cannot be a private language, that is, a language understood by only one creature, (Davidson 1992, 264–65)

* 1. Davidson’s analysis of language also entails a refutation of a Cartesian form of scepticism that doubts whether we ever have knowledge of objective reality. Summarizing the analysis in ‘The Second Person’, Davidson concludes:

The most basic sentences necessarily involves, then, three elements: the 'teacher' (which may be a community of speakers with no pedagogical intentions), the 'learner' (who may be entering a first language, or consciously trying to decipher another), *and a shared world*. Without the external world shared through ostension, there is no way a learner could discover how speech connects with the world. Without a 'teacher', nothing would give content to the idea that there is a difference between getting things right and getting them wrong. *Only those who thus share a common world can communicate*; only those who communicate can have the concept of an intersubjective, objective world.

A number of things follow. If only those who communicate have the concept of an objective world, only those who communicate can doubt whether an external world exists. Yet it is impossible seriously (consistently) to doubt the existence of other people with thoughts, or the existence of an external world, since to communicate is to recognize the existence of other people in a common world. Language, that is, communication with others, is thus essential to propositional thought. This is not because it is necessary to have the words to express a thought (for it is not); it is because the ground of the sense of objectivity is intersubjectivity, and without the sense of objectivity, of the distinction between true and false, between what is thought to be and what is the case, there can be nothing rightly called thought (Davidson 1994, 234), italics added.

### Normativity

Davidson is interested in understanding language and to offer a plausible conception of the subject. In addition, his analysis of radical interpretation also contains an implicit conception of normativity:

* 1. Normativity is implicit in his analysis of radical interpretation, as it involved a notion of correct interpretation.
     1. Correct interpretation cannot be understood as applying general rules or conventions (of language) to a particular case (the words of a particular speaker at a certain occasion).
        + For Davidsons analysis rejects the very idea of general conventions of language: “We must give up the idea of a clearly defined shared structure which language-users acquire and then apply to cases”, (Davidson 1986, 446).
        + Interpretation is correct when we interpret the particular speaker we are trying to understand as she intends to be interpreted. It is therefore a matter of adequacy to the situation with its unique specificity.
     2. We should understand what is involved in saying that correct interpretation is to understand as the speaker intends to be understood.
        + For, of course, that intention of the speaker is not directly accessible to us (we cannot look into her heart or her head and we learned from Wittgenstein that it is not fertile to think of thoughts, attitudes or intentions as ‘things in the head or heart’. The only evidence for a speaker’s intentions are his (linguistic and other behaviour). In this sense, a correct interpretation is an interpretation that makes sense of the speaker’s behaviour.
        + It his important to see that in trying to make sense of a speaker or agent’s behaviour, we often appeal to things that speaker or agent does not or even sometimes cannot know. To give a simple example, imagine we know that the speaker is the victim of a hoax; her neighbour has unbeknownst to the speaker bought extremely clever robot-rabbits that are very difficult to distinguish from real rabbits. The speaker does not know it but we do. Naturally, we will interpret what she is saying in the light of our knowledge that what she is talking about are not actually real rabbits, but robot rabbits and our knowledge that the speaker does not know of the robot rabbits.
  2. Davidson’s analysis of radical interpretation is only possible if we assume that speakers and thinkers share a form of rationality – a form of rationality moreover that is inescapable. No surprisingly, in explaining this view Davidson uses a Wittgensteinian phrase

But it makes no sense to speak of comparing, or coming to agree on, ultimate common standards of rationality, since it is our own standards in each case to which we must turn in interpreting others. This should not be thought of as a failure of objectivity, but rather as the point at which “questions come to an end”. We cannot […] go behind our own ultimate norms of rationality in interpreting others. Priority is not an issue. We would have no full-fledged thoughts if we were not in communication with others, and therefore no thoughts about nature; communication requires that we succeed in finding something like our own patterns of thought in others.

I have been stressing rationality as coherence, the fitting of one thought to another. The need to find the thoughts of others more or less coherent (by our own standards, it goes without saying) in order to acknowledge and identify them as thoughts is sometimes called a principle of charity (Davidson 1994, 233).

## IV. Bernard Williams’ moral relativism

As explained in the beginning of this chapter, Goodman, Quine and Davidson combined the heritage of American pragmatism with analytical philosophy. Their analyses focused on abstract notions such as truth, the revision of beliefs and the world. None of these three authors wrote much about ethics (except for one or two interesting papers of Davidson). In order to see what their views may imply for ethics, we look briefly into the analysis of ethics by Bernard Williams (1929-2003).

Williams was not an American, but we may say that he applied the pragmatist thesis defined above to ethics. In this, he is close to Rorty, but he differs from Rorty in offering a more theoretical analysis of what this application of the pragmatist thesis to ethics might invovle. In saying that he applied the pragmatist thesis to ethics, I am not repeating something that Williams himself would have said. One important inspiration for his understanding of ethics is Hume (and Elisabeth Anscombe) as well as Nietzsche and Greek literature.

### Internalist interpretation of practical reason

* 1. What connects Williams with Davidson is his understanding of the notion of ‘reason’. During radical interpretation, we not only pay attention to what speakers say; it pays also to heed what he is doing.
     1. The explanation is the interdependence of attitudes (beliefs and desires) and language: in radical interpretation we try at the same time to understand what the speakers are saying (that will help us understand what their attitudes are) and what their attitudes are (if we know their beliefs or desires, we might understand what they are saying).
     2. However, attitudes are not only the reasons why speakers are saying what they are saying, they are also the reasons why they are acting as they are.
     3. It follows that the attitudes, being the reasons speakers/agents have for saying and acting and helping us to understand speakers/agents, can be said to *explain* what they are saying or doing. Reasons are explanatory.
  2. We do not only speak of ‘reasons’ in order to explain what a person is saying or doing. We often say that a person has a reason to do something in the sense that he ‘ought to do it’. Williams distinguishes two kinds of reasons
     1. ‘External’ reasons are reasons for action that derive directly from the agent’s duties, responsibilities, obligations and so on. External reasons do not depend on whether the agent is motivated by them (e.g. We say that Johnny has reason to do his homework, even if he does not at all feels like it). Precisely because we may have external reasons without being motivated by them (or even without knowing that we have these reasons), external reason cannot explain actions.
     2. Internal reasons are reasons that an agent has because we can explain how these reasons are connected to desires, projects, needs the agent has. Johny may have a reason to look in the box, without his knowing it, because he craves chocolate and there is chocolate in the box.
     3. Because of the connection between reasons and explanation of actions, Williams argues that there are no external reasons. In this sense, Williams adds to what follows from Davidson’s analysis.
        + From Davidson’s analysis, it follows that reasons are explanatory.
        + Williams adds to this that this implies that reasons cannot be external, reasons must be connected to what motivates an agent.
        + This is Williams’ ‘internalism’.

### Ethics

* 1. Obviously this has implications for what it means to have a reason in ethics
     1. Even ethical considerations (for instance what is our duty as humans) do not constitute reasons for an agent, if there is no connection with what the agent himself is motivated to do. At the very least, they “should say something special about A, and not merely invoke in connection with him some general normative judgments” (Williams 1995, 186, 191–92), cf. (Williams 1995c), 186 and , 191-192. Ethical considerations give a reason to act “only if they are related to other reasons for actions, and generally to […] desires, needs and projects” (Williams 1993, XIII).
     2. Internalism does not preclude criticism of people who do not share the ethical concerns that inspired the criticism. As Williams himself points out, internalism does not require us, for instance, to spare amoral persons from criticism who remain deaf to ethical considerations. It merely implies that to say that they have *a reason* to behave differently does not add anything significant to the ethical disapproval we have already expressed (Williams 1995c), 190-191; (Williams 1995b), 39-40; (Williams 1985), 192.
     3. The vital issue for Williams is therefore not the truth of ethical utterances but rather “the value of truth” (Williams 1995e), 230, 232. Ethical reflection is above all a search for the truths with which we are willing to live (Williams 1995b), 37-38; cf. (Williams 1995e), 236, 237; (Williams 2005b), 36. It is a search for self-knowledge. The primary concern is to know who you are, or, in the words of D.H. Lawrence quoted by Williams with approval, to find “your deepest impulse and follow that” (Williams 1972), 79.
  2. From this it follows that Williams is very skeptical about the possibility of giving an objective justification for ethical outlooks,
     1. For Williams such an objective justification of ethics would be possible only on the basis of scientific knowledge about what human beings need in order to lead a happy life or, at least, to function normally (for instance information about basic natural needs and motivations).
        + For guidelines about how to be happy or to live normally (assuming that they do not depend on further value judgments) may well constitute, like health instructions, internal reasons.
        + Considerations relating to what all human beings ‘at some level’ want – such as health or happiness – explain what a particular person wants, while still applying to everyone. The resulting ethical outlook would be internalist but also universalist and objectively justified.
     2. However, there are problems with this idea of objective and scientific justification of ethics.
        + It remains to be seen, even for Williams himself, whether such a scientific is really and at the moment it is surely still far from being realized
        + Moreover, even if a scientific account of how to be happy or to live a normal life is available, it is not certain that that account would resolve all ethical issues (even if we have an scientific answer about how to live happily that may not provide an answer to the question how to live happily *together.*
     3. Accordingly, there is no way of saying that our current ethical outlook – to the extent that we do, at the present, have a common outlook –is objectively preferable.
        + Our actual ethical outlook is ‘one of many that are equally compatible whit human nature’.
        + To this Williams adds an historical argument that is similar to Rorty’s ethnocentrism.

[…] a truthful historical account is likely to reveal a radical contingency in our current ethical conceptions. Not only might they have been different from what they are, but also the historical changes that brought them about are not obviously related to them in a way that vindicates them against possible rivals (Williams 2002, 20).

* 1. The interesting thing is that, according to Williams, the absence of objective foundations for our ethical outlook does not reduce that outlook’s authority.
     1. If ethics is really connected to our deepest motivations and impulses, it is implausible that we could or would give up those on the basis of objective considerations or purely rational arguments (such as the argument that there is no objective justification for ethics).

We know that most people in the past have not shared [our outlook]; we know that there are others in the world who do not share it now. But for us, it is simply there. This does not mean that we have the thought: ‘for us, it is simply there.’ It means that we have the thought: ‘it is simply there.’ (That is what it is for it to be, for us, simply there.), (Williams 2000, 492)

* + 1. In other words, when we have to make decisions (about how to react to something we are confronted with) we have not anything else but our owns current ethical outlook to base that decision upon, even if we realize that we are confronted with people who have themselves an outlook that is different from our own.

The fact that people can and must react when they are confronted with another culture, and do so by applying their existing notions—also by reflecting on them—seems to show that the ethical thought of a given culture can always stretch beyond its boundaries. It is important that this is a point about the content or aspirations of ethical thought, not about its objectivity. Even if there is no way in which divergent ethical beliefs can be brought to converge by independent inquiry or rational argument, this fact will not imply relativism. Each outlook may still be making claims it intends to apply to the whole world, not just to that part of it which is its “own” world (Williams 1985, 176).

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# Chapter 6: Resisting Indeterminacy

Reactions to the Quine-Davidsion model by John McDowell and Kripke, Donellan and Putnam

## Naming, Necessity and Natural Kinds: Donellan, Kripke and Putnam

[This section is pasted together from (Schwartz 2012, chap. 7 and 6)]

### Model logic and possible worlds

* 1. Look at any newspaper: it is full of sentences using modal terms such as “may,” “might,” “could,” “must,” “need not,” “had to,” etc. Our language and thought is full of notions about what could have been, could not have been, must have been, and so on. Analysis and regimentation of such notions promised to be a fertile area of logical work - the logical next step after working out the logic of the truth-functional operators “not,” “and,” “or,” “if . . ., then, . . ., “ and the quantifiers “all,” “some” [that was pioneered by Frege] (Schwartz 2012, 205–6).
  2. Modal logic is the logic of necessity and possibility. Modal logics are developed by adding to standard propositional or quantificational logic new symbols for necessity and possibility. The usual symbols are □ for necessity and ◊ for possibility.
     1. Thus, □ P (read “box P”) means that P is necessarily true.
     2. ◊P (read “diamond P”) means that P is possibly true.
     3. Unlike standard first order predicate logic, many different non-equivalent systems of modal logic compete for attention, and logicians were not agreed on which, if any, were correct (Schwartz 2012, 204–5).
  3. In 1960’s this gave rise to a revival of an idea of the rationalist philosopher Leibniz: possible worlds; the meaning of ‘necessarily’ or ‘□’ and ‘possibly’ or ‘◊’ could be explained in terms of the reference to a domain of objects informally describe as a ‘possible’ world’; if in the actual world Donald Trump is 45th president of the US, there is a possible world where Hilary Clinton has that property.
     1. We can interpret necessity as truth in all possible worlds (in all possible worlds 2 + 2 equals 4)
     2. and possibility as truth in at least one possible world.
  4. The developments in modal logic and the consequent interest in possible worlds metaphysics were reflected in the philosophy of language. And developments in the philosophy of language affected ideas in analytic metaphysics. The most exciting advances were due to work by Saul Kripke, Hilary Putnam, and Keith Donnellan in the theory of reference. Their insights […] replaced the old traditional theory of reference that had been assumed and accepted by all analytic philosophers from Frege on […] (Schwartz 2012, 238).

### The traditional theory of meaning and reference

* 1. The central features of the traditional theory of meaning, are the following:
     1. Each meaningful term has some meaning, concept, intension […]. This meaning is known or present to the mind when the term is understood [We recognize here the conceptual atomism of Moore and the conceptual realism of Frege]. The meaning or intension of a term is the conjunction or the cluster of properties associated with the term. The concept of lemons determines the conditions of being a lemon, i.e. falling into the extension of the term ‘lemon’ (Schwartz 2012, 241).
     2. The meaning determines the extension in the sense that something is in the extension of the term if and only if it has the characteristics included in the meaning, concept, intension, or, in the case of the cluster theory, enough of the features (Schwartz 2012, 241).

Applying this to proper names:

* [E]each meaningful proper name has associated with it a set of descriptions. The unique thing that satisfies the [conjunction of ] descriptions or […] enough of [a cluster of] descriptions, is the referent of the name.
* When one uses a name, the intended referent is determined by the descriptions that are associated with the name being used, (Schwartz 2012, 242).
* For example, the name ‘Aristotle’ stands for a person who did such-and-such things, who was Plato’s pupil, who was the teacher of Alexander, who founded the Lyceum, who wrote the *Nicomachean Ethics*, etc.
* In other words, proper names are disguised descriptions.
  + 1. Analytic truths are based on the meanings of terms.
* [B]eginning with David Hume and continuing to the logical [empiricists] and beyond, all necessity was construed as analyticity or somehow based on linguistic conventions. *De re* modality was rejected, as was any sort of extra-linguistic necessity. The intension of a term was taken to be the essence of the kind of thing named.
* Since the conjunction of properties associated with “lemon” tells us what it is to be a lemon, and generates necessary truths about lemons, it is the essence of lemon. [If one of the properties associated with lemon is ‘has a sour taste’. The statement ‘lemons have a sour taste’ is a necessary truth. Alternatively, if the name ‘Aristotle’ is just an abbreviation of certain descriptions including that he was Alexander’s teacher, the statement ‘Aristotle was Alexander’s teacher’ is a necessary truth. This is what Wittgenstein means when he states “Essence is expressed by grammar” (Wittgenstein PU, para. 371).
  1. This theory of meaning does not fit our use of terms, as is particularly clear with proper names:
* We often use names (or even terms) without knowing many descriptions true of the person named: we may know that Aristotle wrote the a Nicomachean Ethics, but who knows that he wrote a book translated as *On Breath*?.
* What’s more even if the only thing we know about Aristotle is that he wrote the *Nicomachean Ethics*, we can make sense of a statement that Aristotle did not in fact write the *Nicomachean Ethics*
* [In ‘Reference and Definite Descriptions’’, Keith] Donnellan (1931-2015) showed reference can take place not only in the absence of identifying descriptions but even when the identifying descriptions associated with the name do not correctly apply to the individual to whom the name refers. Donnellan distinguishes between two kinds of use for definite descriptions - the attributive and the referential.
  + When using a definite description attributively, the speaker intends to be saying something about who[m]ever or whatever fits a certain description, without necessarily having any idea who[m] or what fits the description. [E.g. when seeing how foully Smith – the nicest person in the world – was murdered, we exclaim ‘Smith’s murderer is insane!’, without knowing who did the murder, whom the description ‘Smith’s murderer’ fits].
  + With the referential use, the speaker has independently a definite idea whom or what he means to be speaking about and uses the description to refer to that individual. A referential description is simply a tool for accomplishing the reference and may succeed in doing this even if the thing referred to fails to fit the description (Schwartz 2012, 243)[E.g. when witnessing the odd behaviour of Jones on trial for murdering Smith, we conclude ‘Smith’s murderer is insane’, where we could clearly answer the question whom we are referring to by that description (i.e. Jones] even if later Jones is acquitted].

### The causal theory of reference: Kripke and Putnam

As the traditional theory is problematic, Saul Kripke (1940) has developed an alternative theory of reference. Following Kripke, we focus first on the case of proper names.

* 1. Kripke […] claims that [names] are rigid designators.
     1. “Rigid designator” is a term coined by Kripke to mean a designator, such as a name or description, that refers to the same individual with respect to every possible world in which that individual exists. If a name is a rigid designator, then it refers to the same individual when used to describe counterfactual situations [i.e. situations that are not actual, such as the situation that Hilary Clinton won the election] as it does when used to describe the actual world (Schwartz 2012, 245). .
     2. This means that a name will refer to the same individual whether or not she satisfies some list of commonly associated descriptions. (Schwartz 2012, 245).
     3. This theory resolves many of the difficulties of the traditional theory
* As we have seen, the traditional theory of proper names entails that at least some combination of the things ordinarily believed of Aristotle are necessarily true of him. When considered carefully, however, this idea is doubtful. We cannot accept that, for example, Aristotle was necessarily a philosopher, necessarily a teacher of Alexander, necessarily a pupil of Plato, and so on. Contrary to [this] account, not even a cluster or disjunction of common beliefs about Aristotle are necessary of him. Aristotle, that very man, might have died in a plague that swept his land when he was an infant. His dying thus would have been a great loss to humanity, but it is one of those things that given the proper conditions could have happened (Schwartz 2012, 245).
* We could discover about some individual that few or none of the things commonly believed about him are true in the actual world. For example, we could discover that Shakespeare was not the author of those plays attributed to him, was not even literate, as indeed some have claimed. […] If the traditional theory were correct and names were not rigid designators, that is, if they referred to who[m]ever or whatever fit certain descriptions commonly associated with them, then […] “Shakespeare” [would refer] to whoever was the author of *Hamlet*, *Othello*, etc., and thus it would be contradictory to suppose that we could discover that Shakespeare did not write those plays […]. Of course, such a discovery is not likely given the evidence to the contrary, but it is not ruled out simply by the semantics of proper names (Schwartz 2012, 246).
  1. What applies to proper names can be extend to common nouns and in particular to nouns standing for natural kinds like ‘gold’ or ‘water’.
     1. According to Kripke, such nouns are like proper names in that they are rigid designators.
* If “gold” is a rigid designator, then it always refers to the same stuff independently of the stuff’s superficial phenomenal properties.
* Furthermore, what gold is cannot be analytically specified by some list of properties, for no matter how much the properties of something resemble what we take to be the superficial properties of gold, the stuff would not be gold unless it was the same kind of substance that is rigidly designated by “gold”. The reference of “gold” would be determined by an underlying trait, such as atomic number, that is discovered empirically.
* That gold is the element with atomic number 79 is an empirical hypothesis, but if this hypothesis is correct then “gold” rigidly designates the element with atomic number 79. Anything else is not gold no matter how much it resembles gold (Schwartz 2012, 248).
  + 1. Two possible situations illustrate this theory
* New discoveries: we could discover that gold is not yellow in the actual world. In order to imagine such a discovery, we can suppose that we have all been victim of massive illusions, or some such thing. Such a supposition is outlandish, but the situation is not impossible. […] A less outlandish example was the discovery that [the animals we call “whales” do not have the property of ‘being fish”]
* In ‘Meaning and Reference’, Hilary Putnam introduces the device of Twin Earth. Twin Earth is just like earth. For instance its lakes and rivers are filled with a liquid that satisfies all the superficial features that characterizes water on Earth: it is clear, colorless, tasteless, etc. Suppose now that we discover that that liquid on Twin Earth has not the chemical formula H2O, but XYZ. We shall have to say that that stuff isn't water but merely XYZ. You will not have described a possible world in which “water is XYZ”, but merely a possible world in which there are lakes of XYZ, people drink XYZ (and not water), or whatever. (Putnam 1977b / 1973, p. 30)\*
  1. How do terms acquire their (rigid) meaning?
     1. According to Kripke, Putnam, and Donnellan, reference is determined by causal or historical chains.

In general our reference depends not just on what we think ourselves, but on other people in the community, the history of how the name reached one, and things like that. It is by following such a history that one gets to the reference (Kripke 1980, 95), quoted in (Schwartz 2012, 262)

* For example, one way in which a name might be connected to a referent is the following: a name is given to a person in a “baptism” or an initial use with the referent present. It is then handed on from speaker to speaker.
* As long as we have the right sort of causal chain, that is, as long as the later speakers in the chain intend to use the name with the same reference as the earlier, reference to the person “baptized” is accomplished by use of the name.
* In this way, reference to the initial referent of the name can be achieved even though the later user of the name knows no descriptions uniquely specifying the referent. This pattern seems to fit our ability to use names to refer to well-known contemporary and historical figures. I may not know anything more about David Beckham than that he's a soccer star, he's British, and [used to play] for a team in Spain. I can and do refer to him, because my uses of his name are connected by social, historical, and causal links to the very person himself. The same holds of my uses of “Aristotle.” They are connected to that very man himself (Schwartz 2012, 254).
* The notion of causal chains also explains how a name that is shared by many people can be a rigid designator. Surely many thousands of people have been named “Aristotle.” How does my use now pick out the famous Greek philosopher and not someone else? It does so because my use now is linked causally to that great philosopher and not to any of those other folks. My intentions can also play a role. The reference fixing descriptions that I attach to my use of the name “Aristotle” help to determine the reference, without being necessarily true of him (or anyone else) (Schwartz 2012, 254).
  + 1. Putnam and Kripke extend the causal theory to natural kind terms.
* Putnam suggests that we “baptize” items that we take to be good examples or paradigms of some substance such as water and then use “water” to refer to whatever has the same nature as the paradigms.
* When we introduce a term this way we need not already know the nature of the stuff we are naming. We hope that such knowledge will come with empirical scientific investigations. The term, once introduced, is handed on from person to person in the referential chain, maintaining its original reference at each link (Schwartz 2012, 254).
  1. One exciting result of this theory of reference is totally new conception of the traditional philosophical opposition ‘necessary vs. contingent, ‘a priori vs. a posteriori’ and ‘analytic versus synthetic’. This novel conception pries apart these distinctions that have often been connected to each other in the tradition and allows for contingent a priori truths and necessary a posteriori synthetic statements cf. (Schwartz 2012, 252).
     1. Empirical necessity: If we are being most accurate, we must say that water is necessarily H2O, if it is H2O. If our theories are correct and there is no error and water is in fact H2O, then it is necessarily H2O. Our certainty that water is H2O is the certainty of a well-established empirical theory, not the certainty that issues from knowledge of a definition; it is not analytic, but if it is true, it is necessary. This means that if water is H2O, then we have an example of a necessary a posteriori synthetic proposition.
     2. Contingent a priori truth: [Kripke argues] that just as there are empirical necessities, there are also contingent a priori truths. The type of case that he points to here is that in which a name is introduced for someone or something whose existence is postulated as the explanation for some observed phenomenon: thus we are introduced to 'Jack the Ripper' as the man responsible for a series of murders committed in the late nineteenth century in the East End of London and to 'Neptune' as the planet responsible for the perturbations in the orbit of Uranus. Since the reference of the name is fixed in this way, the truth of the resulting identity statement – e.g. 'Jack the Ripper is the man reponsible for the East End murders - is a priori; but it is only a contingent truth, since the man who was responsible for these murders might not have done them at all. [This paragraph is taken from (Schwartz 2012, 128)]
     3. The explanation is that Stefaan cf.Schartz 247/§3\*

### Limiting indeterminacy

* 1. [One way of summarizing the theory of reference proposed by Kripke and Putnam is to say that they reinstate Aristotelian essentialism, but adapted to the rise of modern science:]

According to the traditional theory, the concept associated with a term functions like the set of identifying descriptions supposedly associated with an ordinary proper name. The new theory of reference holds that the descriptions, if any, associated with a natural kind term do not have a decisive role in deciding whether the term applies in a given case. At best, the descriptions associated with such a term are a handy guide in picking out things of the kind named, but the descriptions do not determine what it is to be of the kind. Its atomic structure determines whether some stuff is gold. Likewise, water is H20. Some stuff is water only if it has the right chemical structure. Biological kinds are determined by genetic structures or some other natural properties discovered by biologists, and other natural kinds are similarly determined by underlying traits (Schwartz 2012, 248)]. [Natural kinds have an essence and it is natural science that discovers that essence].

* 1. [In this respect, the role of natural science is not restricted to discovering how nature works but also determining what we are talking about] Putnam insists on what he calls the linguistic division of labor. He cannot distinguish between an elm tree and a beech. Most of us cannot distinguish between a fir and a spruce. Any mental images or ideas that I have connected to the terms “fir tree” and “spruce tree” are the same. Yet these certainly do not mean the same for me, nor do they have the same reference. We rely on experts to determine the references of many of our terms. We defer to experts to decide the reference of natural kind terms. I do not need to know the difference between firs and spruces for my words “fir” and “spruce” to have different and, I hope, correct reference. We have an institution of experts and science, and communities of users who intend to use the terms according to the accepted scientific account, even if we do not know what it is. I am a member of that community, and so I can use the terms accordingly (Schwartz 2012, 260).
  2. To put the results of this new theory of reference in terms that are familiar from earlier chapters: the new theory of reference is an attempt to overcome, at least with regard to proper names and natural kinds, Frege’s distinction between sense (*Sinn*) and reference (*Bedeutung*).
     1. The upshot of Frege’s distinction was that the objects in reality (Venus) to which a word or expression refers are ‘given’ through language, i.e. the sense of the words or expressions (‘Morningstar’ vs. Eveningstar’); our relation with the objects are mediated by language. By trying to abandon the sense-reference distinction, Kripke and Putnam try to reestablish an immediate relation between talking subjects and the objects talked about.
     2. If Kripke' s and Putnam's views are correct, the conjunction or cluster of descriptions associated with some natural kind term is neither necessary nor sufficient for the application of the term.
* What, then, is the role of the descriptions that are commonly associated with natural kind terms? Kripke distinguishes between fixing the reference of a term and giving its definition. When we fix the reference of a term, we give a description that helps the hearer pick out what we have in mind. Thus, for example, when teaching someone the meaning of color words, I may say: “By green we mean the color of that car over there. “ The description “the color of that car over there” is meant to fix the reference of “green” not give its meaning in the sense of supplying a synonym for “green.” I did not mean that “green” is defined as whatever color that car over there happens to be. If I had meant this, then if someone painted that car a different color, say red, then “green” would refer to red, since that happened, then, to be the color of the car. When I fix the reference of a term, I give a description that is to be taken as giving the referent of the term, not the meaning in the traditional sense. I have a definite kind of thing in mind when I use the term, and now I want to help the audience pick it out. The descriptions associated with natural kind terms function to fix the reference of the terms, not give their meanings. The traditional theorists assumed that descriptions given in connection with natural kind terms were defining the term, in the sense that anything satisfying the description falls in the extension of the term. According to Kripke, such descriptions are typically meant only to fix the reference (Schwartz 2012, 250).
* Baldwin uses a telling metaphor to explain the relation between talking subject and talked about object:

Thus the situation is like that of launching a satellite into orbit: we need context-dependent [expressions, such as the colour of that car] in order to blast through the general fog of ordinary thought and single out a definite object. But once we achieved this identification we can use it to launch a name into orbit thank to the essential necessity of identity, the name should then be able to retain its rigid referential function without further help from the context of utterance, (Baldwin 2001, 130).

* + 1. In this context, it is important to remember that the new theory of reference was the result of attempts at making sense of possible worlds, itself intended as an account of the semantics of modal logical and our talk about necessity and possibility.
* In this context, Baldwin introduces another analogy that underscores how the theory of reference re-establishes immediate contact with the object and thereby again invokes the analogy with sight.

As the title (*Naming and Necessity*) of Kripke’s lectures indicates, he holds that he use of proper names provides ordinary thought with rigid designators which enable us to keep constant the identity of things under discussion while we engage in hypothetical speculations concerning them, much as our ability to fouc visually on physical objects enables us to keep track of our environment while we change our point of view (Baldwin 2001, 129).

### Avoiding people

One way of understanding the implications of the new theory of reference is to explain how it avoids the indeterminacy that follows from Davidsons (and Quine’s) philosophy of interpretation and language. That is not to say that we have to abandon Davidson’s suggestion that a Tarski-style theory of truth can serve as a theory of interpretation for a language. On the contrary, a Tarskian theory of truth will include axioms stipulating the reference of proper names or natural kinds terms. We can understand the theory of reference developed by Kripke and Putnam as spelling out how these axioms will have to be formulated (Field 1972).

But there is a price to pay for this reduction of indeterminacy: philosophy of language or, more in particular, theory of reference seems no longer concerned with explaining how we understand actually speakers or how we know what they are talking about.

* 1. Two indication of this disconnection between actual speakers and theory or reference is this.
     1. As Kripke is aware, the new theory of reference has no solution to the problems for which Frege introduced the distinction between meaning and reference in the first place.
* The fact that there is a difference in the information given by different identities; s ‘Venus is Venus’ not very informative, while ‘The Morningstar is the Eveningstar’.
* The fact that names behave differently in intensional contexts, such as believe sentences. ‘John believes that the Morningstar is the planet closest to the sun’ may be true, but ‘John believes that the Eveningstar is the planet closest to the sun’ may be false. Similarly with ‘John believes that Cassius Clay is the greatest boxer of all time’ ad ‘John believes that Mohammed Ali is the greatest boxer of all time’. How is this to be explained when ’Morningstar and Eveningstar’ and ‘Cassius Clay’ and ‘Mohammed Ali’ eachrigidly denote the same thing.
* The connection between the two cases is easy to see: they both depend on the actual cognitive ‘situation’ of the persons involved, what they actually know. For people who did not know that the Morningstar is the Eveningstar, the second identity is informative and when John does not know that Cassius Clay took the name ‘Mohammed Ali’, the one belief-sentence can be true, while the other is false.
  + 1. Schwartz (2012, 259)compares two speakers
* Suppose someone on earth, who is ignorant of chemistry and Twin Earth, say, someone back in the 1800s, says “Water is the only drink for a wise man”. No doubt, Thoreau was sincere when he uttered this. So Thoreau believed that water is the only drink for a wise man. Accordingly, the truth or falsity of his belief depends on whether or not H20 is the only drink for a wise man. The wisdom of only drinking XYZ is irrelevant to Thoreau's belief. When Thoreau's twin on Twin Earth utters “Water is the only drink for a wise man”, he is talking about water-twin, not water. The wisdom of only drinking H20 is irrelevant to Thoreau-twin's belief. The two beliefs have differing truth-conditions and thus, one could say, content.
* So what the Kripke-Putnam theory of reference tells us is are the following two things
  + It gives axioms for references for the natural kind term ‘water’ such as

(A1) ‘Water’ in English refers to H2O.

(A’1) ‘Water’ in Twin-English refers to XYZ,

* + And as Schwartz explains it tells us that, following from the two axioms, the two sentences have different truth-conditions. If Thoreau’s statement is uttered on Earth it is true, but if it is uttered on Twin-Earth it is not and vice versa
  + In allows for a context independent evaluation ‘(un)true-on-Earth’ vs. ‘(un)true-on-Twin-Earth.
* What it does not tell you
  + Where the speakers think they are, i.e. whether they speak English or Twin-English. Therefore, you do not know the reference of the sounds ‘water’.
  + Where you think the speakers are, i.e. whether what they are talking about is H2O or XYZ.
* Because the theory does not tell you this, it does not tell you enough to
  + Understand what the speakers are saying, what beliefs they are expressing
  + Evaluate what they are saying or believing: is it true or untrue?
  + The theory does not allow us to understand a particular speaker nor to evaluate his beliefs

## McDowell’s naturalized Platonism

In Chapter 4, we mentioned the Best-Account Argument for reality or objectivity, proposed by Charles Taylor and John McDowell according to which the entities or features our best account of things has to invoke, should be included in what we call ‘reality’ or ‘objectivity’. McDowell has developed this argument into a more comprehensive conception of nature and of human beings as thinking and knowing things in *Mind and World* (1994).

### Conundrums of modern philosophy

According to McDowell, modern philosophy has been perched on several seesaws. With modern philosophy McDowell refers to philosophy after the rise of modern science that left us with a conception of the world, reality or nature and of ourselves as animals that reduces these notions to what is discoverable by natural science. It therefore holds that nature or reality is ‘disenchanted’, that is devoid of significance and that human beings as animals are part of nature

Animals are, as such, natural beings, and a familiar modern conception of nature tends to extrude rationality from nature. The effect is that reason is separated from our animal nature, as if being rational placed us partly outside the animal kingdom. Specifically, the understanding is distanced from sensibility (McDowell 1994, 108–9).

McDowell does not reject natural science, nor the notion of ‘nature’ or ‘animals’ that came with it. He only *rejects* the reduction of nature and reality to what is explained by natural science.

We can acknowledge the great step forward that human understanding took when our ancestors formed the idea of a domain of intelligibility, the realm of natural law [.e. the domain of modern natural science], that is empty of meaning, but we can refuse to equate that domain of intelligibility with nature, let alone with what is real, (McDowell 1994, 109).

The reason why McDowell refuses to equate the domain of intelligibility (created by natural science) with nature or what is real lies in the seesaws that we can find in the history of modern philosophy: with regard to different issues that are all in some sense issues of normativity, modern philosophy continuously returns to different versions of essential two opposed positions, that McDowell labels ‘bald naturalism’ and ‘rampant Platonism’. This shows that a conception that reduces reality and nature to what is describable in terms of natural science has problems making make sense of certain normativity.

* 1. One of these conundrums leading to the seesaw between bald naturalism and rampant Platonism was labelled by Sellars the Myth of the Given as we mentioned in Chapter 3.
     1. It concerns the relation between our senses (what McDowell calls ‘receptivity’) and knowledge of the world. Knowledge is not just a matter of information received; it requires a judgment about the information received (we judge that it warrants the conclusion, e.g. that this chair is red). Such judgment are not merely a matter of our senses or of ‘receptivity’ but of understanding. As judgment presupposes a form of independence from the information to be judged, McDowell often calls it ‘spontaneity’.
     2. If we describe our senses as they are described by natural science as stimuli impinging on our nerve-ends we face the problem of explaining how such impingings lead to knowledge about the world. The rampant Platonist approach is to somehow try to argue from the bare fact that the stimuli impinging on our senses *cause* our beliefs about the world to the conclusion that sense data *justify* these beliefs. It thereby turns a causal relation into a *justificatory* relation without much argument. In a sense, it conjures ‘justification through the senses’ out of thin air. The bald naturalist approach gives up on the idea that knowledge is knowledge *of the world*. It is satisfied with a coherence theory of knowledge: knowledge is not a matter of corresponding (or ‘mirroring’) the world but of construction a coherent systems of beliefs, including the beliefs caused by the sense data. Both rampant Platonism and bald naturalism accept the assumption that everything that can be said about sense organs is said by natural science.
  2. Another of the conundrums is the debate about practical reason in which Williams’s rejection of external reasons for action is one position. (We briefly explained Williams position in Chapter 5)
     1. Williams’s approach could be understood as an example of bald naturalism: there are only *internal* reasons, that is reasons somehow connected to pre-existing motivations (that can perhaps be described by psychology or biology). As we explained in Chapter 6, Willaims positions makes it very hard, if not impossible, to see how ethical considerations unconnected to pre-existing emotions may be a reason to do anything.
     2. The rampant Platonist approach with regard to reasons for action would be to maintain that there are reasons independently of an agent’s motivations. Ethical considerations are an example of such external reasons and we can therefore explains how ethical considerations are reasons. However, in this approach we cannot explain how such (external) reasons, including ethical considerations, can be motivating.

### Getting of the seesaw

* 1. McDowell on practical reason

[The following account of McDowell’s reaction to this position of Williams is copy pasted from (Baldwin 2001, 243–44)].

* + 1. McDowell begins from the thought that there are straightforward cases in which someone *notices* what is required of them and acts accordingly (e.g. by helping a child across a road). In such a case, McDowell says 'the requirement imposed by the situation, and detected by the agent's sensitivity to such requirements, must exhaust his reason for acting as he does' ('Virtue and Reason', pp. 142-3).
    2. Thus, according to McDowell, in understanding the agent's reason for her action we do not need to find a [connection with] her antecedent motivations with the requirement she has just noticed; her character is such that what she has noticed is reason enough for action. Her reason for action is therefore, in Williams' sense, an external reason; […], since the judgement that some action is required of her is inherently motivating.
    3. McDowell takes it that 'properly brought up' people are such that in recognizing their obligations, they are thereby motivated to do what is required, and he regards-this point as central not only to his disagreement with Williams but also to his rejection of the Humean psychology which treats motivations as fundamentally detached from beliefs. […]
    4. [The objection was made] that since the role of education is to inculcate a standing desire to live properly, it is this desire in McDowell's 'properly brought up' people which ensures that noticing the requirements of morality motivates action.
    5. But McDowell can reply that the reflective endorsement of this desire to live properly is itself best understood as motivated by a recognition of the general demands of morality in a way which is not compatible with [only accepting internal reasons]. McDowell has also pointed to cases of moral 'conversion' whereby someone (Dostoevsky's Rashkolnikov, for example) comes to recognize and be motivated by responsibilities he had not previously acknowledged. In such cases, McDowell suggests, a new awareness of external reasons for action brings about by itself a radical shift in motivation without drawing on any antecedent disposition to do what ls required to live properly.
  1. McDowell on empirical knowledge
     1. The solution to the problem of empirical knowledge is to stop seeing experience merely in terms of natural science.
     2. When we reject such a reductionist view, we must acknowledge two things about our senses
* Experience does not merely deliver stimuli from which we must derive information about their causes. Experience must essentially be viewed as open to the world.
* Experience cannot be understood as mute impingings of certain nerve-ends; what McDowell calls receptivity is already informed by concepts: what happens in experience is that, for example, we are aware that certain things appear as red to us. That does not mean that they are red (we must still judge whether things are as they appear). But it does mean that we are aware that those things also appear as coloured; the appearance of red is conceptual in that we know that such an appearance is linked through implication with an appearance as coloured.
  + 1. Rejecting the reduction of experience to the impignings of stimuli of natural science is tantamount to a rejection of the skeptical question: do our senses ever yield knowledge of the world?

[I am not] aiming to answer traditional sceptical questions, to address the predicament of traditional philosophy. That is the predicament in which we are supposed to start from some anyway available data of consciousness, and work up to certifying that they actually yield knowledge of the objective world. Of course if that is our predicament, we need to answer the traditional sceptical questions before we can talk of openness to the world. But my talk of openness is a rejection of the traditional predicament, not an attempt to respond to it (McDowell 1994, 112).

### Rational animals, second nature and tradition

We see that the solution McDowell proposes for both conundrums are similar. Ethical requirements of a situation or appearances of things are out there to be noticed by creatures that (as a result of upbringing) have the faculties to notice them. Or more generally:

The idea is that the dictates of reason are there anyway, whether or not one's eyes are opened to them; that is what happens in a proper upbringing. We need not try to understand the thought that the dictates of reason are objects of an enlightened awareness, except from within the way of thinking such an upbringing initiates one into: a way of thinking that constitutes a standpoint from which those dictates are already m view, (McDowell 1994, 91–92).

* 1. **Metaphysics**: we see how this line of argumentation is a generalization of the Best Account-argument for reality or objectivity. What is (‘out there’ in) reality is not only decided by natural science; it must also include what is required by our best account of practical reason and empirical knowledge.
  2. **Rational animals:** McDowell’s argument also requires a certain conception of the ‘animals’ that are open to these requirements.
     1. The are two general characteristics that must be ascribed to them
* The objective world is present only to a self-conscious subject, a subject who can ascribe experiences to herself. It is only such a self-conscious subject that can be aware that (in) the world something appears as such and such. It is only in the context of a subject's ability to ascribe experiences to herself that experiences can constitute awareness of the world.
* Not every appearance of things in the world is true. So, we must ascribe to the subjects a faculty of judgment, the capacity to critically assess appearances. It is only the capacity to reflect critically on experiential information about the world that allows us to say that human experience is open to the world.
* In short, the dictates of reason are there only to rational animals.
  + 1. . It follows that there humans have a different mode of orientation to the world than other animals:

When I say that for a creature with a merely animal life the milieu in which it lives can be no more than a succession of problems and opportunities, I am not saying that it conceives its environment in those terms. That would be to try to attribute to mere animals a full-fledged subjectivity, involving a conceptually mediated orientation that ought, as such, to count as an orientation to the world, even though we restrict the concepts in question to concepts things satisfy in virtue of how they relate to biological imperatives, which is to acknowledge that the orientation lacks the freedom and distance that would be required for it to be an orientation to the world at all. The point of the distinction between living merely in an environment and living in the world is precisely that we need not credit mere animals with a full-fledged subjectivity, an orientation to the world, at all, not even one that is restricted in that way. This is not to imply that features of the environment are nothing to a perceiving animal. On the contrary, they can be problems or opportunities for it, as I have been saying. The point is just that we must distinguish that from saying that the animal conceives the features as problems or opportunities (McDowell 1994, 116).

* + 1. This difference with animals is vividly brought out in McDowell’s criticism of a famous paper by Thomas Nagel, ‘What is it like to be a bat? (1974) (For a 3-minute summary of this paper see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p5kqlwK3NKg>). According to McDowell, Nagel’s question is not more intractable or important than the question what it is like to be a dog or a cat, animals whose sensory apparatus are not so far removed from ours as bats’ are (although cats have different eyesight from ours). Nagel thinks his question is important and interesting because what he really is asking is what it would be like to be an intelligent rational animal with a sensory capacity for echo-location. Only try to imagine what it would be like to be such a rational animal “is to project our imagination into an alternative possible world in which our subjectivity is in part differently constituted” (McDowell 1994, 121). For real bats this does not, as bats “do not display full subjectivity”.
  1. **Naturalized Platonism**: in order to resolve the conundrums following from a disenchanting science McDowell explains how reality includes dictates of reason that are noticeable by rational animals appropriately brought up.
     1. Is McDowell’s position not a new version of rampant Platonism, one of the unsatisfactory positions that were a symptom of the malaise that originated with the rise of natural science? Rampant Platonism conjures up faculties that supposedly allows us to overcome the problems of empirical knowledge or practical reason and paste those faculties on our animal nature.
     2. In contrast, McDowell’s naturalized Platonism to be able to explain how the faculties he appeals to, are perfectly natural.

My proposal is that we should try to reconcile reason and nature, […] According to the view I have recommended, conceptual capacities are in one sense non-natural: we cannot capture what it is to possess and employ the understanding, a faculty of spontaneity, in terms of concepts that place things in the realm of law [i.e. the concepts of natural science]. But spontaneity is inextricably implicated in receptivity, and our capacities of receptivity, our senses, are part of our nature. So in another sense conceptual capacities must be natural. (McDowell 1994, 86–87)

* + 1. In order to express this naturalized Platonism, McDowell appeals to the notions of ‘second nature’ and *Bildung¸* the initiation into a tradition.

Reflection about the Bildung of individual human beings should be enough to distinguish the naturalized Platonism I have recommended from rampant Platonism. And in this reflection we can regard the culture a human being is initiated into as a going concern; there is no particular reason why we should need to uncover or speculate about its history, let alone the origins of culture as such. Human infants are mere animals, distinctive only in their potential, and nothing occult happens to a human being in ordinary upbringing.

* + 1. McDowells account is abstract, but it is easy to make it less so specific.
* What is required for a creature to have the faculty that makes it possible for something to appear as red to that creature? Well, for one thing, it requires the capacity to reflect that something that appears ‘green’, is perhaps not green after all (but appears green because it is under a blue spotlight). And all of this requires to have the concept of ‘green’ and to know how (when) to ascribe that concept.
* Similarly, what is required for a creature to have the faculty that makes it possible for something to appear to that creature as the courageous thing to do in that situation and, in addition, to act upon that? Again it requires the awareness that something that appears ‘courageous’ at first sight may not be really courageous and the capacity to act upon that awareness. That in turn requires that that creatures has the concept of ‘courage’ and is able to correctly to ascribe it to (possible) actions in a situation.
* It is not surprising therefore that Bildung, the initiation into a tradition includes the initiation into a language (such as the language that includes words such as ‘green’, ‘blue’ or ‘courage’.
* Human beings are […] are transformed into thinkers and intentional agents in the course of coming to maturity. This transformation risks looking mysterious. But we can take it in our stride if, in our conception of the *Bildung* that is a central element in the normal maturation of human beings, we give pride of place to the learning of language.
* In being initiated into a language, a human being is introduced into something that already embodies putatively rational linkages between concepts, putatively constitutive of the layout of the space of reasons, before she comes on the scene. […] A mere animal, moved only by the sorts of things that move mere animals and exploiting only the sorts of contrivances that are open to mere animals, could not single-handedly emancipate itself into possession of understanding. Human beings mature into being at home in the space of reasons or, what comes to the same thing, living their lives in the world; we can make sense of that by noting that the language into which a human being is first initiated stands over against her as a prior embodiment of mindedness, of the possibility of an orientation to the world..
* […] In the picture I am suggesting [the functions of language as "instrument of communication" and as "vehicle of thought" are not fundamental but] secondary. The feature of language that really matters is rather this: that a natural language, the sort of language into which human beings are first initiated, serves as a repository of tradition, a store of historically accumulated wisdom about what is a reason for what.
* The tradition is subject to reflective modification by each generation that inherits it. Indeed, a standing obligation to engage in critical reflection is itself part of the inheritance. But if an individual human being is to realize her potential of taking her place in that succession, which is the same thing as acquiring a mind, the capacity to think and act intentionally, at all, the first thing that needs to happen is for her to be initiated into a tradition as it stands (McDowell 1994, 125–26) .

### Tradition and History

* 1. McDowell’s use of the concepts of second nature and Bildung helps to arrive at a good understanding of what it means to be a part of a tradition and to be initiation into a tradition. To arrive at that understanding it is useful to start out from some ideas of Wittgenstein.
     1. As was explained in Graylings account of Wittgenstein’s later philosophy, Wittgenstein explains the learning of a language in terms of learning how to follow a rule. And competent rule-following is the result of training:

“The child learns his language from the grown-ups by being trained to its use. I am using the word "trained" in a way strictly analogous to that in which we talk of an animal being trained to do certain things” (Wittgenstein, Blue and Brown books, p.79 quoted in (Grayling 1988, 83.)'

We could extend this to being initiated into a tradition. As the child is trained in a manner similar to how an animal is trained, we can say that such training involves that you follow the tradition blindly, that is without understanding why you do what you do.

* + 1. One way of understanding this (proposed by (Kripke 1982) and Crispin Wright) could be as follows. The existing tradition and the customs that it entails constitute a form of normativity for members of a community connected to the tradition: individual members act incorrectly or use words incorrectly, when they interpret the rules in a different way than the community does. Individuals are subjected to norms in that deviating members are open to criticism by other members of the community. On the level of the community itself, however, there is no bases for speaking of normativity: the community interprets the rules as it interprets them, there is no ground for criticizing the community. In this sense, the individuals follow tradition blindly; they do what the community requires from them. And the community is nothing but a collection of individuals who manifest behaviour that is more or less similar; they lack any common basis for that behaviour.
    2. McDowell’s terminology allows us to formulate a different interpretation of participating in a tradition and a community linked to a tradition. To formulate this interpretation in paradoxical way: by (at first) being forced to follow the tradition blindly we have our eyes opened to what is out there according to the tradition itself. As McDowell explained, through *Bildung*, through the initiation into a tradition or a language we acquire a second nature that allows us to notices the dictates of reason that are out there.
    3. Moreover, acquiring a second nature is becoming a rational animal. The dictates of reasons are noticeable by rational animals, they appear to rational animals. This rationality involves possession of the necessary concepts (such as ‘red’ or ‘courage’), self-consciousness but also a critical attitude. In other words, even though we start out as blindly following a tradition, we gradually must develop a critical attitude. Tradition itself impels us towards criticism, reflection and adaption.
  1. According to McDowell, we cannot make sense of the normative aspects of our lives, such as empirical knowledge or practical reasons, unless we accept that there are dictates of reason out there. That is we cannot reduce the world or reality to what is describable by natural science: in addition to the realm of (natural) law we must acknowledge the space of reasons.
     1. Granted this claim about the world or reality, there is a consequence that McDowell not seems to recognize: if we should not let natural science determine the meaning of words such as ‘nature’, ‘world’, ‘reality’, ‘objectivity’, if he meaning of these words is also determined by our best account about these normative aspects of our lives, we should also acknowledge that ‘nature’, ‘world’, ‘reality’, ‘objectivity’ may have a history.
     2. Of course, natural science provides natural laws that are to be applied at all times. But that need not be part of the best account of, say ethics or politics; For example, Bernard Williams would certainly maintain that ethical questions (such as ‘what is the best life?’ ‘what is happiness?’ ‘What is the best way of living together?’) have a correct answer. Bu he would defend the claim that probably the answer that is correct answer for us was not correct for a medieval monk or a Japanese samurai. In other words, the dictates of reason out there, the space of reason may be changing through history.