Quine's Thesis of the Indeterminacy of Translation: A Wittgensteinian Critique

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by

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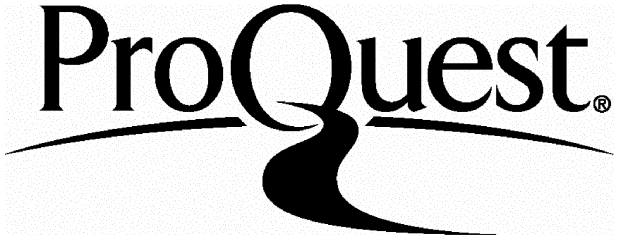

ABSTRACT

This dissertation is intended to be a critical discussion of Quine's indeterminacy of translation thesis. I analyze this thesis from within the conceptual framework of the later Wittgenstein's philosophy. The main objectives of this discussion are to show that: the indeterminacy thesis can be dismissed by making use of Wittgenstein's conception of meaning as use; that even the mere idea that there is no fact of the matter about the correctness of different translations of the sentences of language does not make sense; and that Quine's linguistic behaviourism falls short of providing a satisfactory explanation of meaning.

In Chapter One I characterize the indeterminacy thesis and explain the main arguments Quine offers in support of it. Likewise, I point out how this thesis relates to other fundamental aspects of Quine's philosophy, particularly, his physicalism and meaning holism.

In chapter Two I provide a general characterization of Wittgenstein's conception of meaning as use and contrast it with Quine's notion of linguistic use and his dismissal of the idea that meaning can be defined in terms of how sentences are used.

In chapter Three I use Wittgenstein's conception of meaning to criticize the indeterminacy thesis and that of the inscrutability of reference. I point out that in places Quine seems to embrace implicitly a notion of meaning very much like Wittgenstein's, which would be inconsistent with both thesis.

In chapter Four I put forward an argument, based on Wittgenstein's notion of "linguistic rule", against the indeterminacy thesis. This argument purposes to show that no satisfactory explanation of meaning can be framed within Quine's linguistic behaviourism.

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This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Sara and Jaime.

Perhaps the doctrine of indeterminacy of translation will have little air of paradox for readers familiar with Wittgenstein's latter-day remarks on meaning.

Quine

INTRODUCTION

In *Word and Object* Quine suggests that the doctrine of the indeterminacy of translation is not foreign to the later Wittgenstein's conception of meaning. In this dissertation I intend to show that Quine's suggestion is wrong-headed. Thus, what I shall do is to use Wittgenstein's semantic conception to show that, on the one hand, the indeterminacy thesis is wrong and, on the other, that even the mere idea that there is no fact of the matter about the correctness of different translations of the sentences of language does not make sense. Likewise, I shall argue that Quine's linguistic behaviourism falls short of providing a satisfactory explanation of meaning.

In Chapter One I offer a characterization of the indeterminacy thesis. Firstly, I distinguish this thesis from some other weaker claims which could be mistaken for it. Secondly, I explain the main arguments Quine produces in support of his thesis. Thirdly, I point out how the indeterminacy of translation relates to other fundamental aspects of Quine's philosophy, particularly, his physicalism and meaning holism.

In chapter Two I provide a general characterization of Wittgenstein's conception of meaning as use. I begin by explaining Quine's own ideas about the relation between meaning and use. Afterwards, I state what this Wittgensteinian conception amounts to, and contrast it with Quine's notion of linguistic use and his dismissal of the idea that meaning can be defined in terms of how sentences are used. In order to bring out a fundamental feature of Wittgenstein's conception of meaning, namely, the fact that

what lies behind our common use of language is our agreement in forms of life, I examine the so-called private language argument. Lastly, I comment on a passage from Quine to show that he misinterpreted Wittgenstein's conception of meaning.

In chapter Three I use Wittgenstein's conception of meaning to criticize the indeterminacy thesis. Firstly, I examine its intralinguistic version, namely, when it applies to our own language. Secondly, I analyze its interlinguistic version, namely, when it applies to foreign languages. In this latter version, the case that brings out most clearly the indeterminacy of translation is that of radical translation. I shall devote most part of the chapter to the examination of this case. I shall also discuss Quine's thesis of the inscrutability of reference, which is one of the main arguments for the indeterminacy of translation. In discussing this thesis, Quine seems to embrace implicitly a notion of meaning very much like Wittgenstein's, which would be inconsistent with both the indeterminacy of translation and the inscrutability of reference. I examine this point in the last section of the chapter.

In chapter Four I put forward an argument, based on Wittgenstein's notion of "linguistic rule", against the indeterminacy thesis. This argument purposes to show that no satisfactory explanation of meaning can be framed within Quine's linguistic behaviourism. This leads us to reject the Quinean notion of "stimulus meaning" and to revindicate our ordinary concept of "meaning", that Quine dismisses on the false basis that it involves a reification of meanings. To this end, I examine, at the beginning of the chapter, Quine's linguistic behaviourism and his rejection of mentalistic accounts of meaning. Afterwards, I explain Wittgenstein's attack on this kind of semantic accounts as well as his dismissal of the idea that meaning can be

analyzed in behaviouristic terms. Before expounding the argument mentioned, I spell out what I call the necessary a-posteriori character of linguistic rules.

CHAPTER ONE

QUINE'S DOCTRINE OF THE INDETERMINACY OF TRANSLATION

Quine's thesis of the indeterminacy of translation is one of the most radical and controversial claims in the philosophy of language. It has far-reaching and disturbing consequences in other areas of philosophy, like the philosophy of mind, just to cite an example. The present chapter will be devoted to the analysis of such thesis. In the first section, I shall distinguish the thesis at issue from some other weaker claims which could be mistaken for it. In the second section I shall explain the main arguments Quine offers in support of it. In the third section, I shall mention how the indeterminacy thesis relates to other fundamental aspects of Quine's philosophy, particularly, his physicalism and meaning holism. The first three sections of the chapter allow us to envisage the kind of strategies that can be adopted to argue against this thesis. Thus, in the last section I shall outline the general strategy I purpose to follow to challenge the indeterminacy of translation.

I.

The indeterminacy of translation thesis holds that there is no fact of the matter about which of the various translations that best fit a person's speech behaviour is correct.

In order to bring out the radical ontological character of this thesis and to avoid misinterpretations, it is useful to distinguish it from other claims with which it is sometimes mistaken[1]. Firstly, I shall differentiate the thesis in question from the so-called underdetermination of translation by behavioural evidence. Afterwards, I shall distinguish it from disagreements among translations that arise when dealing with non-literal meanings, from conceptual differences between languages and differences in the translators' objectives.

Quine's indeterminacy thesis does not claim that incompatible schemes of translation of a person's language can fit equally well all his or her actual speech behaviour. If this were the case, it could be expected that future verbal evidence would decide which of the competent manuals is right. The only problem here would be that at present we do not have sufficient evidence to favor one of the renderings over the others. Similarly, Quine is not claiming that different translations can be equally compatible not only with a person's actual linguistic behaviour, but also with all his predictable utterances. If this were so, it could still be, though unknown to us, a fact of the matter about what the person means by a given sentence. On the contrary, Quine maintains that there is no fact of the matter about which of the manuals that fit best with all the actual and potential speech behaviour is correct. In other words, the question about the correctness of different translations is simply undecidable, but not because of lack of verbal evidence or because the facts that would decide the issue are somehow impenetrable for us. This question is undecidable since the only evidence for meaning is our dispositions to assent and dissent from the utterance of sentences under particular stimulatory

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[1]. In this point I follow the analysis made by Robert Kirk of what he calls trivializing interpretations of the indeterminacy thesis. Cf. his *Translation Determined* pp 3-9.

conditions, and this evidence can be compatible with divergent renderings of our expressions. Therefore, the indeterminacy thesis should be distinguish from the epistemological claim that translation is underdetermined by all behavioural data. Instead, this thesis is the ontological claim that the kind of facts that bear upon questions of linguistic meaning cannot settle the question as to which of various incompatible manuals of translation is correct. Then, translation in indeterminate.

Secondly, sometimes the translation of poetry can give rise to irresolvable disagreements as to how to render a particular sentence, given, say, the different "poetical meanings" that expressions can have. However, Quine's indeterminacy thesis has to be distinguished from these kind of disagreements over "poetical meaning". This thesis applies to literal meaning or what Quine calls cognitive meaning.

Thirdly, conceptual differences between languages do not imply indeterminacy of translation. It can be the case that a language has certain terms that other one lacks, in which case only rough renderings of such words are possible. Robert Kirk illustrates this point by means of the ancient Greek word "*aulos*", which was used to refer to a musical instrument that had some features of the flute, some of the clarinet and some of the oboe. In this case, it cannot be said that "*aulos*" is synonymous with either "flute", "clarinet" or "oboe", since the *aulos*, that ancient instrument, although it had certain characteristics in common with each one of the other instruments mentioned, was different from them. The indeterminacy of translation does not either amount to the impossibility to produce an exact rendering of a word or sentence given this kind of conceptual differences between languages, since it is meant to hold between exact translations, where there are no conceptual gaps. The point of the indeterminacy thesis is

not that there is no an exact translation of the sentences of a language, but rather that incompatible manuals fit equally well the speakers' speech behaviour.

Lastly, I want to point out that a certain rendering that is adequate for a given purpose can turn out to be inadequate for other aims. However, discrepancies among translations arising from differences in the linguists' goals should not be confused with the indeterminacy thesis. On the one hand, the fact that an expression can be given different renderings according to the linguists' own objectives is entirely consistent with even a realistic conception of meaning. In this way, the variability of translations due to "pragmatic" reasons does not mean that there is no fact of the matter about what the sentences in question mean when rendered literally. As Kirk says: "indeterminacy is supposed to exist even when scientific sentences are being translated 'literally' for normal scientific purposes"([2]).

II.

Having distinguished the indeterminacy thesis from some other claims for which it can be mistaken, I shall now look at the arguments Quine offers in support of it([3]).

Firstly, it is important to clarify the relation between the indeterminacy thesis and the underdetermination of our theory of nature. In his reply to Chomsky's paper *Quine's Empirical Assumptions*, Quine says that:

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[2]. *Ibid.* p 7.

[3]. I follow here partially Gabriel Segal's classification of these arguments (handout for the philosophy of language lectures, autumn term, 1992)

> The indeterminacy of translation is not just inherited as a special case of the underdetermination of our theory of nature. It is parallel, but additional([4])

For Quine, our theory of nature is underdetermined by past and future evidence, given that a future observation can conflict with it, or an observable event that conflicts with it can be overlooked. What is more, such theory is underdetermined by all possible observations, since even if they were fixed, our actual theory could still be a different one. This last point is based on the fact that the "observational criteria of theoretical terms are commonly so flexible and fragmentary"([5]). Thus, the higher the degree of theoreticity of a term, the more it can accept different renderings, since the links with experience of highly abstract notions are far less tight than those of, say, observation sentences. Hence, even though all the possible experiences were fixed, it would be possible to have discordant translations of such notions. There is likely to be disagreements among the authors as to how much of the physical theory is empirically unsettled. For some people, only the most abstract branches of physics are thus unfixed, whereas for others the empirical slack affects even our common-sense talking of physical objects. Nevertheless, in spite of the fact that all possible observations are insufficient to reveal the ultimate truth about the structure of the world, there is still a fact of the matter about it. The additional character of the indeterminacy of translation with respect to the underdetermination of our theory of nature consists in the fact that even if the whole truth about the structure of the world were established, the translation of sentences of one language into another would remain indeterminate.

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[4]. Quine, V "Reply to Chomsky" in *Words and Objections. Essays in the Work of W.V Quine*. p 303.

[5]. Quine, V "On the reasons for indeterminacy of translation" in *The Journal of Philosophy*, 1970 p 179.

Hence, although linguistics is part of behavioural science and thereby of physics, the indeterminacy of translation is not just an instance of the underdetermination of our theory of nature.

We have, then, that translation is underdetermined by physics. A choice among physical theories does not mandate a choice among schemes of translation. As Quine puts it, incompatible manuals can be compatible "with all the same distributions of states and relations over elementary particles"([6]), that is, they can be physically equivalent, while differing in the rendering of particular sentences.

Let's now look at what Quine calls the argument "from above", which is related to the translation of a radically foreign physicist's theory. In translating such a theory, the first step is to render the native observation sentences by equating them with expressions of our own language with the same stimulus meaning. Afterwards, the linguist goes on to project analytical hypothesis about the meaning of the native theoretical statements. These hypothesis are justified if they imply observations sentences that match with the informant's verbal behaviour. As it happens in the case of our theory of nature, the problem here is that the rendering of the alien physics is underdetermined by translation of the native observation sentences, since the former can vary even though the latter be fixed. Thus, as Quine summarizes, the question about which one of two incompatible physical theories the native really believes does not have any significance. There is no fact of the matter for the different schemes of translation of the alien physics to be right or wrong about. Therefore, as has been said, the higher the degree of empirical slack someone is willing to admit in physics, the more scope there is for indeterminacy of translation. For Quine, such

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[6]. Quine, V "Things and their place in Theories" in *Theories and Things*. p 23.

indeterminacy reaches our everyday discourse about the most ordinary characteristics of ordinary bodies.

The next argument is the one "from below", which is based on the thesis of the inscrutability of reference. Quine argues that there is no way to know what the speakers of a language wholly alien to us refer to by the use of the term "gavagai", since the denotation of terms is bound up with the apparatus of individuation of each language. Therefore, in order to settle the reference of "gavagai", it is necessary to know what items of the foreign language are we going to count as analogues of our pronouns, identity, plurals, etc. But we face here a number of alternative renderings of such linguistic items, all of them compatible with the speakers' verbal behaviour. Then, reference is inscrutable. This inscrutability has, as Quine remarks, only an indirect bearing on the indeterminacy thesis, since it does not affect the stimulus meaning of observation sentences, but just that of non-observation ones. The stimulus meaning of the expression "Gavagai" remains the same whether we take the term "gavagai" to refer to rabbits, rabbit stages or undetached rabbit parts. In other words, the occasion sentences "Rabbit", "Rabbit stage" and "Undetached rabbit part", are stimulus-synonymous, given that each of them "comprise the stimulations that would make people think a rabbit was present"([7]). On the contrary, the non-observation sentences containing "gavagai" can be rendered into English in different ways depending on which of the various possible referents of such term we happen to pick out. Hence, paraphrasing Quine, it can be said that the inscrutability of reference only brings indeterminacy of sentence translation in its train in the case of non-observation expressions.

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[7]. Quine, V "On the reasons..." p 181.

Another of the arguments for the indeterminacy thesis is founded on Quine's linguistic behaviourism. This doctrine claims basically that knowing the meaning of a sentence is nothing more than being disposed to use it and react to it in certain ways under certain concurrent observable circumstances. Radical translation involves making decisions, in that on some occasions linguists have to decide whether to ascribe to the natives a certain seemingly irrational belief or interpret their utterance in such a way as to make it conform with our paradigm of rationality, at the cost of complicating the grammar of the object language. But then, same sentences can be given different and even incompatible renderings. One manual of translation may render, for example, a native sentence as the belief that human beings possess a language, whereas another one may render it as the belief that they do not, and both translations can be made to fit equally well the speakers' dispositions to assent and dissent from the sentence in question under particular sensory stimulations. And since the only possible facts about meaning are such verbal dispositions, they fall short of yielding determinate meanings as intuitively conceived.

The last argument has to do with the so-called theoretical economy. In fact, this is an argument for linguistic behaviourism. However, it gives support to the indeterminacy of translation thesis since, for Quine, the latter is a consequence of the former. According to the principle of theoretical economy, the less explanatory apparatus science invokes the better. Thus, highly developed sciences resort to a relatively meagre conceptual framework in order to explain all the empirical data. Therefore, if semantics can account for all the data concerning the meaning of sentences in terms of behavioural dispositions - and hopefully some day this behavioural explanation will be replaced by a neurological one - then there is no room at all for mentalistic semantics. In this

way, something like our "old notion of separate and distinct meanings"([8]), according to which meaning is perfectly determined, has no room within a behavioural or neurological account of meaning. But then, if all the evidence there is for meaning is our verbal dispositions to assent and dissent from the utterance of sentences under particular prompting stimulations, sentence translation is indeterminate, since "if translators disagree on the translation of a Jungle sentence but no behaviour on the part of the Jungle people could bear on the disagreement, then there is simply no fact of the matter"([9]).

Even though the main point of the experiment of radical translation is to make a philosophical "critique of the uncritical notion of meanings and, therewith, of introspective (mentalistic) semantics"([10]), it is not always explicit what Quine means by this doctrine. He does not seem to take it as the thesis according to which meaning is something subjective. Instead, what he seems to have in mind is that "meaning something by 'P'" is a sort of mental fact, that is, something, whatever it might be, that transcends our behavioural dispositions. Thus, for Quine, any semantic account that does not explain meaning in terms of verbal dispositions, or in terms of neural activity, is mentalistic in the sense just explained. This seems to be confirmed by the fact that Quine holds that there are three kinds of explanations: physiological, behaviouristic and mental. Therefore, any account of meaning has to fall under one of these categories. I shall come back to this point in the last chapter.

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[8]. Quine, V "Indeterminacy of translation again" in *The Journal of Philosophy*. January, 1987 p 9.

[9]. Quine, V *Ibid*. p 10.

[10]. *Ibid*.

III.

Quine's linguistic behaviourism and consequent rejection of our "uncritical" concept of meaning, as well as his thesis about the indeterminacy of translation, are embedded in his physicalism and semantic holism. In order then to have a better view of Quine's position, I shall briefly examine how physicalisn and semantic holism relate to the indeterminacy thesis.

According to physicalism, every happening in the world is, in the last analysis, a physical fact, a modification of the actual arrangement of the basic particles that constitute the raw material from which matter is made of. Thus, as Quine puts it,

> nothing happens in the world, not the flutter of an eyelid, not the flicker of a thought, without some redistribution of physical states([11])

Since physics studies the essential structure of the world, there is a sense, Quine says, in which all scientific explanations are physical. The reason is that the other sciences actually describe physical facts, though in ways that are useful for different interests and purposes, but they do not provide us (as it were) with knowledge of aspects of reality that physics is unable to penetrate. Hence, only physics can give us uncontaminated and complete scientific explanations, which have no other purpose than to provide an accurate description of the essential structure of the world. In passing, it is important to point out that Quine does not commit himself to the reductionist thesis that all significant factual discourse, like that of the non-basic natural sciences, is *reducible* to physics. (Such a reductionism would hold, for example, that discourse in the social sciences can be

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[11]. Quine, V *Theories and Things*. p 98. Cited in Hookway, C *Quine*. p 212.

rephrased in physical terms). Hence Quine can allow that discourse in the non-physical sciences is autonomous, in that it serves purposes different from those of physics.

However, *within* a "scientific semantics" important parts of natural language should be eliminated, according to Quine. Natural language, as Quine remarks, contains a considerable amount of intensional and modal idioms that are not fact-dependent, and therefore, have no role whatsoever within a physicalist conception of science. These idioms, like our propositional-attitude idioms and our "uncritical" notion of meaning, should be ruled out if we are trying to achieve a scientific understanding of our speech behaviour, since the truth conditions of expressions containing intensional idioms are not specified in physical terms and fail to fulfill the principle of substitutivity that the purely extensional canonical notation for science must meet([12]). It is therefore not possible to provide a logical calculus for the intensional idioms or to formalize the rules governing the validity of arguments containing them. That is why, as Hookway remarks, Quine is skeptical about whether the richer semantic framework intensionality calls for can be worked out([13]).

In consequence, given that our intuitive and "uncritical" concept of meaning is an intensional notion, it has no place within a "behaviouristic semantics", according to which the only evidence for meaning is our verbal dispositions to react in certain ways before the presence of stimulatory conditions. As I said above, this behavioural account of meaning, according to Quine, could (in principle) be some day replaced by a physical

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[12]. The principle of substitutivity says (roughly) that sentences with the same truth-value, predicates or relational expressions with the same extension and co-referential names are intersubstitutable *salva veritate*.

[13]. See Hookway, C *Op Cit*. p 96.

(neurological) explanation of our verbal dispositions([14]).

Lastly, I ought to mention how the indeterminacy of translation is related to what might be called Quine's semantic and confirmation holism([15]). According to semantic holism, language is like a network composed of nodes and paths that link them. The sentences of our language are the nodes of the network and the semantic relations between them are the paths. The meaning of a sentence is thus determined by its position with respect to the whole system of nodes and paths. On the other hand, confirmation holism holds that no individual sentence of a linguistic system has its separate bundle of observable or testable consequences. Instead, it is "the whole of science" or "a reasonably inclusive body of scientific body", which has such consequences (the so-called Quine/Duhem (Q/D) thesis)([16]).

Before attempting to spell out the relation between these two kinds of holism and the indeterminacy thesis, it is important to point out that philosophers have asked whether Quine really holds semantic holism or just commits himself to holism about confirmation. According to Fodor and Lepore, the difficulty is that, in those few places where Quine seems to embrace the former thesis, the wording leaves room to wonder whether he is just rephrasing the latter. Consider the following passage:

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[14]. It is worth emphasizing here that Quine's dismissal of the "old notion of separate and distinct meanings" does not involve a rejection of semantics. On the contrary, as he stresses, much useful work remain to be done regarding the use of words and expressions. See Quine, V "Indeterminacy of translation again" p 9.

[15]. This distinction between semantic and confirmation holism is taken from Fodor and Lepore. See their "Meaning holism and confirmation holism" in *Holism. A Shopper's Guide.*

[16]. *Ibid.*

> The idea of defining a symbol in use was, as remarked, an advance over the impossible term-by-term empiricism of Locke and Hume. The statement, rather than the term, came with Frege to be recognized as the unit accountable to an empiricist critique. But what I am now urging is that even in taking the statement as unit we have drawn our grid too finely. The unit of empirical significance is the whole of science([17])

Fodor and Lepore claim that if there is a holistic semantic thesis in "Two dogmas", it is contained in this paragraph. They go on to say that given both its position in the text and the occurrence of phrases like "unit accountable to an empiricist critique" and "unit of empirical significance", it is tempting to think that this passage is just a reiteration of the Q/D thesis. They conclude that it is at least that. However, they say that three considerations suggest that it is worth taking seriously the view that a semantic thesis is at issue: the reference to Frege; the critical tradition according to which "Two dogmas" is a *locus classicus* for semantic holism; and the fact that it is quite plausible to think that, just as Quine offers the Q/D thesis to oppose (say) Carnap's localism about confirmation, so too he offers semantic holism to oppose Carnap's localism about meaning. That is, since reductionism is taken by Quine to be both a semantic and an epistemological doctrine, it is natural to construe its denial, namely, holism, as both a semantic and an epistemological doctrine too([18]).

For present purposes, I shall take for granted that Quine holds both semantic and confirmation holism. Similarly, I assume that his argument for meaning holism is that it follows from the Q/D thesis and verificationism, as

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[17]. Quine, V "Two dogmas of empiricism" in *From a Logical Point of View*. p 42.

[18]. See Fodor, J and Lepore, E. *Op Cit*. pp 40-1.

is the conventional wisdom([19]). As Fodor and Lepore remark, to get semantic holism from the Q/D thesis one needs to relativize what a statement means in a theory to what that theory says about the confirmation conditions of the statement. And this is precisely what verificationism does, which Quine embraces: "The meaning of a statement is the method of empirically confirming or infirming it"([20]).

According to confirmation holism, our sentences do not face the tribunal of experience individually, but as a whole or corporate body. Thus, "every statement in a theory (partially) determines the level of confirmation of every other statement in the theory"([21]). Quine holds that there are sentences directly related to experience, like the observation ones, which are situated at the periphery of our linguistic system. On the other hand, there are scientific sentences, like the most abstract truths of physics, which form the central part of our network of beliefs. These are connected with experience in a mediated way by means of other sentences located somewhere in between the observation and the scientific ones. Due to this interconnection among the sentences of our language, an experience that contradicts certain beliefs can be accommodated in different ways. We can opt to modify, say, the observation sentences that the experience in question more explicitly challenges, or decide to keep those sentences by introducing compensatory adjustments in other beliefs not directly linked with such experience.

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[19]. Fodor and Lepore argue that Quine does not intend to derive meaning holism from the Q\D thesis together with verificationism. Moreover, they hold that meaning holism can be resisted even assuming that holism of confirmation is right-headed, and that the consequence of rejecting the analytic/synthetic distinction is the latter and not the former. See their "Meaning holism...".

[20]. Quine, V "Two dogmas..." p 37.

[21]. Fodor, J & Lepore, E *Op Cit.* p 41.

In consequence, even the most weird beliefs could be held to be true, in spite of the evidence against them, if we made major changes in other sentences. When we choose, for example, to revise our conceptual framework in a certain fashion rather than in another, we are guided by pragmatic considerations, like simplicity and economy. It is better to accommodate recalcitrant experiences in a way that allows us to keep the grammar of our language as simple as possible. Therefore, a revision of the sentences we hold as true that results in an excessive complication of grammar and that ascribes to us extremely bizarre beliefs, is likely to be avoided on pragmatic grounds. However, there is nothing that compels us to modify one set of sentences rather than another.

It is important to emphasize that Quine's rejection of the analytic/synthetic distinction amounts to the claim that our knowledge of confirmation relations among sentences is a-posteriori and holistic, that is, that no individual sentence has its own bundle of testable consequences([22]). In consequence, supposed analytic truths can be modified or even discarded in view of a new arrangement of our beliefs that accommodates a recalcitrant experience, and synthetic ones can be held to be true despite all the evidence against them. Thus Quine says, that we actually hold certain sentences to be analytic reflects the fact that the present state of our theory of nature makes it easier to give up certain beliefs than others, reckoned as more fundamental for the coherence and veracity of such theory.

As I said some paragraphs back, semantic holism is generally taken to be the result of confirmation holism and verificationism. If the meaning of a sentence is held to be the method of confirming or disconfirming it, then, since

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[22]. See Fodor, J & Lepore, E. *Op Cit.* p 38.

the confirmation conditions of a sentence are holistic, that is, partially depend on the confirmation conditions of every other sentence, the meaning of a sentence is holistic too. What is, then, the relation between semantic holism and the thesis about the indeterminacy of translation?. According to Hookway, semantic holism undercuts the "explanatory pretensions" of those attempts to account for meaning which resort to psychological notions, like "belief" and "desire". The point seems to be that since all the sentences of our language are open to revision regardless of their status at a certain time, the interpretation of propositional-attitude sentences can vary if that helps to accommodate our theory of nature to some new data. This suggests that our intensional concepts do not have any special status to explain meaning.

On the other hand, according to meaning holism, all the terms of language, even those more closely linked to the stimulations of our receptor organs, are more or less theoretical, given that under a certain revision of our beliefs forced by a new experience, terms like "rabbit" can be given an odd translation and be rendered by a highly theoretical term. Consequently, the meaning of sentences containing "rabbit" thus altered will be indeterminate. And given that all terms can be translated in this way, indeterminacy seems to permeate all our sentences.

IV.

As I said at the beginning of the chapter, in trying to argue against the indeterminacy thesis it is possible to adopt different strategies. I can envisage three of them. The first strategy consists in challenging some of the arguments provided in support of the thesis at issue, assuming Quine's general conceptual framework, on which this thesis is based. Thus, if we assume Quine's analysis

of meaning in terms of verbal dispositions, stimulus meaning, sensory stimulations and so on, the result of a critique of some of the arguments for the indeterminacy of translation may be that Quine has not produced so far any sound argument to prove it([23]). For example, one can attempt to show that since semantics is part of our theory of nature, translation is affected by the same kind of underdetermination that afflicts this theory. Meaning would be then underdetermined. The second strategy is far more radical. It consists in attempting to undermine Quine's general conceptual framework. In this way, Quine's holism, empiricism, behaviourism, physicalism and so on, can be put into question. The main purpose of this sort of strategy is not to demonstrate the lack of support for the indeterminacy thesis, but to show that it is unattainable (or even nonsensical) since the philosophical assumptions on which its plausibility is based are wrong-headed. The third strategy is to attack both the arguments for the indeterminacy thesis as well as Quine's conceptual framework. The strategy I shall adopt to deal with the thesis at issue is of this kind. On the one hand, I try to show that linguistic behaviourism is unattainable, which makes semantic indeterminacy nonsensical. On the other hand, I challenge some of the arguments for this thesis, like the inscrutability of reference, by making use of Wittgenstein's conception of meaning.

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[23]. This is the approach adopted, for instance, by Robert Kirk. Cf. his *Translation...*

CHAPTER TWO

WITTGENSTEIN'S CONCEPTION OF MEANING AS USE AND QUINE'S CRITIQUE OF THE IDEA THAT MEANING IS USE

In the present chapter I purpose to provide a general characterization of Wittgenstein's conception of meaning as use, since the analysis of the thesis about the indeterminacy of translation I shall undertake in the next chapter relies heavily on this conception. To this end I shall explain, in the first section of the chapter, Quine's own conception of the relation between meaning and use. I begin by examining his criticism of the everyday reifying way of talking about meaning. Afterwards, I analyze his rejection of the thesis of meaning as use. In the second section, I state in a straightforward way what the Wittgensteinian thesis of meaning as use amounts to, and contrast it with Quine's conception of linguistic use and his dismissal of the idea that meaning is use([24]). In the third section, I shall examine the so-called private language argument, since this highlights a fundamental feature of Wittgenstein's conception of meaning, namely, the fact that what lies behind our common use of language is our agreement in forms of life. Finally, in the fourth section, I shall briefly comment on a passage from Quine in

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[24]. It should be bear in mind that Wittgenstein rejects to be seen as putting forward new philosophical thesis, since, for him, this kind of thesis arises from misunderstandings of the grammar of our language. With this caveat in mind, I speak of Wittgenstein's thesis of meaning as use in a Wittgensteinian non-philosophical sense, that is, as a description of the grammar of the concept of "meaning". In any case, the term "thesis" can be replaced by our ordinary notion of "conception" or other related ones.

order to show that he misinterpreted Wittgenstein's conception of meaning.

I.

In order to bring out the *special character* of our intuitive notion of meaning, Quine distinguishes it from the more ordinary and unproblematic concepts of "designation" and "denotation". In *Use and its place in Meaning*, he affirms that words and phrases refer to things in two ways. Names and singular descriptions designate their objects, provided they have one. On the other hand, predicates denote each of the objects of which they are true. The meaning of words and phrases should not be confused with either their designation or denotation, since two descriptions, like "the author of Waverley" and "the author of Ivanhoe", can designate the same person and have, however, different meanings. Similarly, predicates denote many things but have only one meaning.

Meanings are apparently, Quine says, a special sort of thing. The word "meaning" is frequently used in our everyday language: we speak of knowing the meaning of an expression, of sentences as having or lacking meaning, of expressions as alike in meaning, etc. On the other hand, there are certain contexts in which such term never appears, for instance, we do not say that a meaning is such and such nor we ask what it is in itself. The problem with our everyday speaking is that even though meanings are not said to be such and such, there are some ordinary expressions that seem to involve that they are some sort of entity. Thus, according to Quine, to say that two expressions are alike in meaning is a misleading way of talking, since it carries with it such hypostatization. Instead of this, however, we can simply say that two sentences mean alike. As Quine remarks, someone who asks

for the meaning of an expression is generally given another one like it in meaning, and this does for him; he does not go on asking for something the two of them mean. To mean is what some sentences do, and "to mean" can be understood as an intransitive verb: it does not require an object to make reference to. In this way, Quine concludes, "one can perhaps talk of meaning without talking of meanings"([25]). In sum, he purposes to eliminate those expressions of natural language that involve a semantic reification.

But, does our common talking of meanings really involve that they are a special sort of entity?. I think the answer is negative. People normally speak of expressions as having the same meaning without, it seems to me, doing any kind of ontological assumption regarding its nature. When we say that "John is a bachelor" and "John is unmarried" have the same meaning, in no way we imply that there is some entity that both sentences (as it were) point to. Accordingly, Quine's suggestion that one can perhaps talk of meaning without talking of meanings is a response to a non-existent reifying tendency he thinks to be deeply rooted in our everyday language. Quine aims at amending our natural way of speaking in order to free it from such unjustified ontological assumptions. However, this reformation is at odds with the ordinary use of the notion of "meaning". The sentences "These words mean the same" and "These words have the same meaning" are semantically equivalent and commonly used interchangeably. So, the distinction Quine introduces between them and his subsequent dismissal of the second kind of expressions and similar ones seem to be a blatant violation of a perfectly legitimate use of the notion, of ways of speaking, at issue. Quine's mistake seems to be on the very first step of his reasoning, namely, with the assumption that there is something wrong with our ordinary talking of meanings. In consequence, he introduces a

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[25]. Quine, V "Use and its place in meaning" in *Theories and Things* p 45.

pointless modification of such talking. An unblinkered look at the grammar of "meaning" shows that its supposed reifying character is illusory. Quine misses the fact that, as Wittgenstein puts it, natural language is (at least in this case) in order. In this way, Quine is led to dismiss a whole set of unproblematic expressions([26]).

Quine introduces his criticism of the thesis of meaning as use when dealing with the notion of semantic equivalence. Within the intuitive and uncritical conception of meaning, he says, the question as to when two sentences count as semantically equivalent gets answered simply by saying that they do so when both have the same meaning. However, as Quine sees it, this cannot be said without paying the high cost of reifying meanings.

But, then, how semantic equivalence is to be fixed?. Quine tries firstly the following answer: an expression is meaningful in virtue of how it is used by people. So, the meaning of an expression can be said to be the set of all expressions that mean like it, that is, that have the same *use*. In this way, two sentences are equivalent when their utterance is prompted by the same stimulatory situations. Similarly, the meaning of a word is fixed by the expressions it appears in and the stimulatory conditions under which it is used. Thus, various words are synonymous when substitution of one for another in a given sentence always produce a semantically equivalent expression. We have then that linguistic use is conceived here in terms of the stimulatory situations under which words are employed and the utterance of sentences prompted. The problem with this account, Quine remarks, is that it imposes an

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[26]. Quine's dismissal of what he thinks to be our ordinary and reifying way of talking of meanings is a consequence of his linguistic behaviourism, that is, of the claim that there is nothing else to meaning than our verbal dispositions to assent and dissent from the utterance of sentences under particular sensory stimulations. The notion of "stimulus meaning" is then the key concept of the former doctrine and the backbone of his thesis of the indeterminacy of translation.

excessively strong constraint on the semantic equivalence of sentences. On the one hand, since no two expressions can be pronounced at the same time, but only successively, the stimulatory situations that prompt them cannot be numerically the same. On the other hand, even if the requirement were only that those situations were similar, it would not be possible to compare them because generally the utterance of sentences is unpredictable. They can be uttered in the most dissimilar circumstances, since the motives that bring them about can vary widely. As Quine puts it, "the speaker may want to instruct, or console, or surprise, or amuse, or impress, or relieve a painful silence, or influence someone's behaviour by deception"([27]).

Due to the elusive character of the notion of semantic equivalence, Quine suggests to put it aside and change our focus to that of cognitive equivalence, which is defined in terms of sameness of truth conditions. In this way, there is no need for us to speculate on the reasons for the volunteering of expressions. Instead of this, we can utter them under certain circumstances and ask "only for a verdict of true or false". Thus, two occasion sentences are cognitively equivalent for a speaker if he is disposed to give matching verdicts to them when queried in matching stimulatory circumstances previously arranged. Similarly, the cognitive meaning of a word is the set of its cognitive synonyms, that is, of those words that can replace it within a sentence without altering the cognitive meaning of the expression.

Let's go back to Quine's rejection of the characterization of meaning in terms of linguistic use. The main reason he gives for such dismissal is that only

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[27]. Quine, V "Use and its place..." p 48. It seems to us that the problem here, following Quine, would be not that we cannot compare the stimulatory situations of sentences, because we indeed can, but that it is unlikely that they match up with each other.

observation sentences, due to their direct connection with experience, can be correlated with the stimulations that prompt their utterance. In contrast, non-observation expressions cannot be so correlated given that:

> Usually the concurrent publicly observable situation does not enable us to predict what a speaker even of our own language will say, for utterances commonly bear little relevance to the circumstances outwardly observable at the time; there are ongoing projects and unshared past experiences. It is only thus, indeed, that language serves any useful communicative purpose; predicted utterances convey no news([28]).

According to Quine, the problem of defining the meaning of non-observation sentences in terms of linguistic use is that at least some of the stimulatory situations that prompt the utterance of such sentences are likely to involve personal projects and experiences with which only each speaker in his own case might be familiar. If these projects and experiences are part of the stimulatory situations that constitute the use of non-observation sentences, clearly the meaning of these sentences cannot be defined in terms of such situations. The reason is that these projects and experiences might only be known to the person who has them, which would make the public character of meaning disappear. Another difficulties for defining meaning in terms of linguistic use thus conceived are that sometimes even the speaker himself may not be aware of the reasons of his verbal behaviour, or realize them after some time, or that the same piece of linguistic behaviour can be prompted by different stimulations. These situations would result in the paradoxical cases of having words without meaning, in the first case, or words with many personal and changeable meanings, in the second. In sum, as Quine remarks, the set of stimulations that cause us to utter a word or a sentence is a too vast and ill-organized universe

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[28]. Quine, V "Indeterminacy ..." p 6.

to determine linguistic meaning, which is supposed not to be dependent on such motivations. The other problem for the conception of meaning as use to which Quine refers in the above quotation is that if linguistic use were to fix the meaning of non-observation sentences, this would enable us to predict what a person would say under particular stimulatory conditions. I shall come back to these points at the end of the next section.

II.

Let us now try to spell out Wittgenstein's thesis of meaning as use. To this end, I shall firstly characterize his notion of language-games, since it provides the background in which the thesis emerges. After that, I shall state what the thesis in question amounts to. Finally, I shall briefly contrast Wittgenstein's conception of meaning as use with Quine's dismissal of the idea that meaning can be defined in terms of linguistic use.

Wittgenstein conceives language as a complex network of language-games that are interrelated in multifarious ways. They do not share a common feature but resemble each other in various ways. Language-games are rule-governed activities involving the use of expressions. Some of the examples of language games Wittgenstein cites are: "giving orders and obeying them, describing the appearance of an object or giving its measurements, constructing an object from a description"([29]). The rules of these games fix how words can and cannot be used. Thus, for example, to master the rules of the language-game of sensations is to know how to employ terms like "pain", "relief", "pleasure", and so on. Wittgenstein compares the process of being drawn into a linguistic community to the way we sometimes learn new

[29]. Wittgenstein, L *Philosophical Investigations*. Sec 23.

games. In both cases, we start off by imitating the verbal and non-verbal behaviour of those who are already insiders of the language or of the game. Subsequently, we get our behaviour encouraged or corrected by them, until gradually we come to master the relevant rules([30]).

The analogy between the process of becoming an insider of a linguistic community and that of learning a game can be misleading if we do not keep in mind the essential dissimilarities between them. As is clear, the learning of a certain game presupposes the subject's linguistic competence. This is reflected on the fact that he can choose whether to learn the game, or decide to spell its rules out in order to assess, say, their consistency. Both actions can only be carried out by subjects who already master a language. In contrast, we have no choice as to whether to become insiders of the linguistic community we are born in; we simply are drawn into it by other speakers. It is by acquiring a language, i.e., by being drawn into a system of language-games, that we learn to think. In this way, the system of language-games constitutes the perspective from within which we think about the world and ourselves. It is not possible to go beyond the perspective of the system and give grounds for its rules, since there is no wider context than our linguistic system for us to fall back on. In this sense, the rules of the system are groundless, we simply follow them([31]).

But despite the essential dissimilarities between learning a game and a language, the former process throws light on the way we acquire the latter given their important similarities. As I said above, in both cases we are trained in a rule-governed activity. And it is by means of a trial and error process that we come to master

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[30]. Nonetheless, unlike in the case of mastering a language, it is possible to be taught a game by means of an specification of its rules.

[31]. See Valberg, J *The Puzzle of Experience*. pp 181-183.

gradually the relevant rules.

Within the general framework of Wittgenstein's conception of language as the totality of language-games, we can now ask: what does the thesis of meaning as use amount to?. The thesis affirms that, for an important sense of the word "meaning", this term can be defined in the following way: the meaning of words are the rules that govern their use([32]). The process of being drawn into a linguistic community consists, in part, in coming to grasp these grammatical maxims. To know the meaning of a word is then to know how to employ it within its respective language-game. That is, to know under what circumstances its application would be right or wrong. To lack this knowledge is like not knowing how to use a tool. We can know what, say, a hammer looks like, be acquainted with its shape, colour, size, etc, but still do not know what it is for and how to use it (though indeed we can guess). It is only by observing it at work, or by being told how to use it, that we eventually become hammer users.

Another way of putting this is the following: suppose we are given a definition of a sign "S" by means of another one "P" we are not familiar with. In this case, the definition does not help us to grasp the meaning of "S", since we do not know how to employ "P", which is supposed to be used in the same way as "S". Thus, knowledge of the sentence "'S' means P" does not imply that we know the meaning of "S", it only informs us that both signs are synonymous, that they can be used interchangeably. Hence, it is not sufficient to know that a word is semantically equivalent to another one in order to know how to use it.

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[32]. In fact, Wittgenstein says that "the meaning of a word is its use in the language". See Wittgenstein, L *Philosophical...* Sec 43. However, I think it is more precise to say that the meaning of a word are the rules for its use in the language, since the former formulation can give rise to behaviouristic interpretations of Wittgenstein that I think he would have dismissed. Nevertheless, I may use sometimes this formulation to emphasize some contrasts between Quine and Wittgenstein.

What is required is something of a different kind. In the case of the definition of "S" by means of "P", what we need to grasp the meaning of "S" is to know the rules for the use of "P". This is a practical knowledge in the sense that it is about how to do something, namely, how to employ the word in question. This practical mastery is acquired by living among insiders, that is, among people who already master the rules for the use of "P". In contrast, the person who only knows that "'S' means P", but lacks this practical knowledge, is in a similar situation to the person who has memorized the mathematical formula: $(a+b)^2=a^2+2ab+b^2$, but does not how to apply it, how to instantiate it.

To illustrate how rules determine what it makes sense to say within a language-game, I shall make use of the following example: imagine a child who is in a very intense pain after an operation, and who says that he has an "awful pleasure" when queried on by the doctor about how he feels. Surely such a response would astonish everyone, since the typical sensation in those cases is, say, a throbbing and piercing pain, but in no way an "awful pleasure". In such circumstances we obviously would not say that the child is not in pain, given that he satisfies so many criteria for being in pain: the fact that he has just undergone a serious operation, his screamings and grimaces, etc. Instead, we would be inclined to say that the child does not know how to use the words "pain" and "pleasure", that is, has not yet mastered the relevant language-games, since he applies these words incorrectly, and in that sense does not know what pain (pleasure) is. In the example, not only does the child apply the term "pleasure" in an inappropriate situation, but he also attaches to it an adjective that cannot qualify it; we speak of "awfulness" in the language-game of pain not pleasure. According to Wittgenstein, the grammar of pleasure would count such an expression as "What an awful pleasure!", under normal

circumstances, as nonsensical([33]).

You will recall that the main reason Quine gives for dismissing the suggestion that the stimulatory conditions (linguistic use) of non-observation sentences fix their meaning is that these conditions may involve ongoing projects and past experiences with which, only each speaker in his own case, might be familiar. It should now be clear that, for Wittgenstein, the use that determines the meaning of a word or expression does not have to do with the personal motivations that cause people to utter them. So long as they employ them in the right situations, that is, according to the rules implicit in the language-games, their motivations can be as divergent as we want.

Quine remarks that if the meaning of non-observation sentences were fixed by the stimulatory conditions that prompt their utterance and we were acquainted with them, this would enable us to predict the speakers' verbal behaviour. Given that, for Wittgenstein, the rules for the use of words should be distinguished from the personal motives and aims that cause someone to utter them, to master such rules does not mean to be able to predict people's utterances. As we have seen, Wittgenstein's thesis of meaning as use implies that certain contexts make the utterance of some expressions nonsensical, like the case of the sentence "What an awful pleasure!" when pronounced by a child who has just undergone a serious operation, but no prediction of the speakers' words is involved here.

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[33]. The reference to normal circumstances is intended to leave aside those cases in which it could be said that the expression in question can be meaningfully uttered, like when it is uttered with ironic purposes to emphasize, say, the intensity of the pain. As Wittgenstein affirms, in this and similar cases there are external criteria that enable us to distinguish when the expression is used in a non-standard way.

III.

Wittgenstein's considerations on the impossibility of a private language highlight a fundamental feature of his conception of meaning, namely, the fact that what lies behind our common use of language is our agreement in forms of life. Before examining these considerations, we need firstly to clarify the philosophical concept of "privacy" Wittgenstein is opposing. To do this, I shall discard certain non-philosophical senses of privacy that are perfectly permissible and to which Wittgenstein has nothing to object:

(1) As is pretty obvious, there is nothing wrong about making a private use of public language, as could happen, for example, in the case of war codes, where an expression like "I desire to go to Paris tomorrow" can be used to transmit military strategies.

(2) Similarly, it is also feasible that children, for playing purposes, rename their sensations with words only intelligible to them, but translatable in principle into English. In this manner, they could, say, replace the word "pain" by the string of letters "niap", which results from putting that term in the other way round. Hence, a sentence like: "I have a throbbing niap on my back" would make sense only to them.

In the first case, an expression of public language is used in a way that deviates from its ordinary employment. When we learn to speak, we are taught to use the notion of "desire" to do a number of things, such as to make confessions and to cause certain behaviour in our interlocutors. Only after we master these primary uses are we in a position to make a private use of "desire", as in (1). This use is a further application of a term that has its normal meaning within the language-game of desires. A

similar point is made by Wittgenstein in relation to the employment of the concept of "pain" to inanimate things. Our ascription of pain to, say, dolls, is a secondary use of the term, since it is in the first place applied to human beings, thus we pretend dolls are humans. As Wittgenstein suggests, it does not make sense to imagine we ascribed pain only to dolls([34]). In sum, the reason why we can make such private uses of words is that there is already a public use of them.

In the second non-philosophical sense of privacy I mentioned above, what we have is a replacement of words according to which the new term "niap" is meant to play the role that "pain" does in our everyday talk of sensations. In that the grammar of the former term is the same as that of the latter, the change in question is only of signs. Thus, if the children happened to tell someone about their game and what the new word means, the person would agree in the grammatical correctness of the sentences containing such a term, since the children would be using it in the same circumstances as everyone else employs "pain". That is to say, there would be an observable regularity between the children's use of the word "niap" and the different contexts of its application, which was similar to that between our utterance of "pain" and the circumstances of its use. For instance, there would be a connection between the fact of one of them being hit on the back with a baseball bat and the utterance of "I'm in niap", which would be similar to that between our being hit in the same way and our utterance of "I'm in pain". Likewise, it would not be the case, under normal circumstances, that after being thus hit, the children would say "I'm feeling feiler", where "feiler" would be another word of their private language that stands for "relief". As is clear, this second sense of privacy also presupposes the existence

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[34]. Cf. Wittgenstein, L *Philosophical...* Sec 282.

of a public language, which makes it perfectly possible.

At this point we can digress a little bit to clarify the status of the sort of private use of expressions and words illustrated in (1) and (2). Do these uses form part of the ordinary meaning of the relevant sentences and terms?. In order to address this question, I shall make use of an analogy Wittgenstein draws between linguistic meaning and the role of the pieces of chess.

> Let us say that the meaning of a piece is its role in the game. Now let it be decided by lot which of the players gets white before any game of chess begins. To this end one player holds a king in each closed fist while the other chooses one of the two hands at random. Will it be counted as part of the role of the king in chess that it is used to draw lots in this way?([35]).

According to the paragraph just quoted, it seems that even though it is not part of the normal use of the king in chess to be employed to draw lots, nothing stands in the way of its being used in this way as long as such use does not conflict with the rules of chess. The same point can be made in relation to the words and expressions of our language. Thus, it seems possible to use a term (privately) in a way not comprehended by its grammar insofar as such employment does not constitute a violation of its linguistic rules. In this manner, we can see there is a sense in which a distinction can be drawn between the essential and the inessential in relation to the use of words. The essential uses can be said to be those sanctioned by its grammar, whereas the inessential ones are those compatible with but not included in it([36]). Thus, the second kind of use does not form part of the ordinary meaning of words and expressions, as in the case of "I

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[35]. Wittgenstein, L *Ibid.* Sec 563.

[36]. This interpretation of Wittgenstein is based on sections 562-568 of the *Philosophical...*

desire to go to Paris tomorrow" when used to transmit military orders.

Having mentioned two senses of privacy in which a private language is perfectly possible, we can ask: what, then, is the sense of privacy that Wittgenstein objects?. He rejects the "philosophical" idea of a private linguistic system that does not presuppose at all, or is not based on public language. Such a private system would have to be construed without recourse to any notion that belongs to public language, otherwise the former would be merely a private use of the latter, like those illustrated in (1) and (2) above, that Wittgenstein reckons as unproblematic and has nothing to object to. As will be spelled out in what follows, a private language thus conceived is something utterly impossible. In essence, Wittgenstein's argument is that in setting up a "philosophical" private language, one has to explain to oneself how its words are going to be used, but this can only be done by making use of our public language. We simply do not have the resources to imagine what such a private linguistic system would look like, since in order to formulate it we would have to, as it were, get out of the public language, and beyond this there is nothing for us to fall back on. In other words, language is all we have to make sense of things([37]).

Wittgenstein exemplifies the philosophical attempts to formulate an instance of a private language in the following way: suppose someone intends to keep a diary about the occurrence of a certain sensation he has never had before. To this end, he gives himself an ostensive definition of it: he concentrates on the sensation he is feeling now and says it is going to be named 'S' and every time he utters the sign he will be referring to this sensation". "S" is meant to be a private sign since it

[37]. See Valberg, J *Op Cit.* pp 181-183.

refers to what can only be known and had by the subject in question.

Does Wittgenstein mean that we cannot have a new sensation and refer to it by means of a certain sign we make up?. I think not. To reject such possibility would be to deny something obviously permissible within the language-game of sensations, namely, to speak of and name new sensations. So, such a rejection would stand in opposition to Wittgenstein's own explicit intention to leave natural language as it stands, that is, not to deny anything that language allows.

The introduction of "S" into language is perfectly possible given that it is not an instance of a private sign. Hence, the names of new sensations, which are supposed to be the most likely candidates for private signs, are not really so. The reason is that when the privatist defines "S" as the name of his sensation, he is making use of the word "sensation" that is part of our common repertoire of linguistic tools. Likewise, were he to characterize S, he would have to resort to the vocabulary available, but then he would be employing the language-game of sensations. Thus, perhaps he would distinguish "S" as being more or less intense, or something between a pain and an itching. As Wittgenstein remarks, the mere act of naming presupposes a great deal of stage-setting. In the present case, what is taken for granted is the grammar of the word "sensation", this shows (as it were) the post where the new term "S" is stationed, in other words, what can and cannot be said by means of it. Even if the privatist were to say, in order to avoid the use of the term "sensation", that S is "something he has", he would be making use of the word "something", which belongs to our language, and more importantly, of a special sense of "having", which should be distinguished from, for example, the sense of "having"

when what is involved is the possession of material objects.

Consequently, in order to name an unknown sensation it is inevitable to draw, one way or another, upon our public language, since beyond it there is nothing for us to fall back on, no perspective from which to speak about our mental states, or even to think of something as "mental" or as a "state". The introduction of "S" into language would be similar, in some respects, to the discovery of a new chemical element. In both situations the new item is given a name and becomes part of a language-game already existent. But "S" was our best candidate for a private sign. If the best candidate for a private sign is not really private, this shows that no private language is possible.

The public character of "S" is also clear when we consider the non-verbal behaviour that is part of the language-game of sensations. Once introduced into language by the person in question, this sign would start being used by other speakers under particular circumstances, and would typically cause certain reactions in the former as well as in the latter. Thus, for example, if S were a very painful sensation, the expression "I have S now" would probably be accompanied by characteristic pain behaviour like grimaces and certain bodily movements. Similarly, it would cause other people to try to comfort or to express sympathy for us. In this way, it would count as an inappropriate use of "S" if the privatist were to say that he has S when it is clear that he is in no pain at all. Thus, the context of application would enable us to distinguish between correct and incorrect uses of the sign at issue. In sum, the use of "S" would be governed by the rules of our language-game of sensations, which would make evident its public character. As Norman Malcolm remarks, in order for a sound to be a word, it has to have a socially regulated role within a

language-game. A sign that I can use as I please is not a word, just a meaningless sound([38]).

The discussion of the possibility of private language leads us to the question of what explains the fact that we normally use words in the same fashion, that is, that we normally follow the grammatical rules that govern their employment in the same way. Wittgenstein rejects the explanation according to which it is the coincidence of our interpretations of these rules what accounts for the regularity in our use of language. According to Wittgenstein, what makes it possible for human beings to share a language is not the fact that our interpretations of the grammatical rules have been the same up until now. Nothing excludes the possibility of our coming up with a discordant exegesis sometime in the future, which could not be discarded on the grounds that it deviates from our past behaviour. It can always be argued that my interpretation of a given rule requires of me to follow a certain pattern of behaviour up to a determinate point, and that from that point onwards the norm demands a different behaviour, but that however I am following the rule all along. Therefore, the agreement in question is not of opinions.

On the contrary, the explanation is that we all share or agree in certain basic patterns of conduct, like reactions to physical stimuli and linguistic training. This is what makes agreement in following a rule possible. If every one of us reacted in a different way when, say, touched fire, or if it were generally unpredictable how someone is to apply color-words after being taught their meaning, no public language would exist([39]). This is clearly stated in section 241 of the *Philosophical Investigations*:

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[38]. Cf. Malcolm, N "Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations" in *The Philosophy of Mind*.

[39]. On this issue cf. section III of chapter 4.

> So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false?. It is what human beings *say* that is true and false; and they agree in the *language* they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life.

The notion of "form of life" comprises those basic patterns of behaviour (what Wittgenstein calls "the common behaviour of mankind"([40])) as well as the way we use language, that is, the activities to which our language-games are associated. In this manner, as Wittgenstein says, "what has to be accepted, the given, is -so one could say- *forms of life*"([41]). This idea of the given is of the most importance, since it means that there is a point where our explanations about our use of language come to an end. Beyond the fact that we share a form of life there is nothing else to be accounted for. This, as we shall see in the next chapter, has important implications for my analysis of Quine's thesis of the indeterminacy of translation.

IV.

In passing, it is worth pointing out Quine's misunderstanding of Wittgenstein's conception of meaning. In a passage from "Use and its place in meaning", Quine says:

> Wittgenstein has stressed that the meaning of a word is to be sought in its use. This is where the empirical semanticist looks: to verbal behaviour([42]).

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[40]. See footnote 46 below.

[41]. Wittgenstein, L *Philosophical...* p 226.

[42]. Quine, V "Use and its place..." p 46.

For Wittgenstein, verbal behaviour, or in Quine's terms, our dispositions to assent and dissent from the utterance of sentences under certain sensory promptings do not exhaust meaning. I think Wittgenstein does not deny that such dispositions are, in some cases, an important element in our grasping the meaning of words. The fact that we assent to the question "Rabbit?" when there is a rabbit within my visual field and dissent from it when there is none, surely would help someone unacquainted with the term "rabbit" to grasp its meaning, namely, that it applies to a certain kind of animals (rabbits). However, from Wittgenstein's perspective, the rules for the use of words cannot always be grasped by merely looking at the dispositions in question. Sometimes we have to look at the speakers' non-verbal behaviour and the circumstances under which words are uttered. Thus, for example, the contexts that surround the expression of the sentence "I'm in pain" (e.g the fact that I have just undergone a serious operation), as well as the pain behaviour, show us the meaning of "pain", that is, the rules that govern its use.

CHAPTER THREE

WITTGENSTEIN AND THE INDETERMINACY OF TRANSLATION

In the present chapter I shall argue against Quine's thesis of the indeterminacy of translation from within the perspective of Wittgenstein's conception of meaning. My critique of this thesis is twofold: on the one hand, I argue that (if we take for granted that the thesis makes sense) it can be dismissed by making use of such conception. On the other hand, I purpose to show that even the mere idea that there can be incompatible translations of the same sentences does not make sense. Likewise, I shall criticize, also from the Wittgensteinian perspective, the Quinean thesis of the inscrutability of the reference, one of the main claims on which the indeterminacy thesis is based.

In order to examine the thesis of the indeterminacy of translation, I shall firstly analyze its intralinguistic or domestic version, that is, when it applies to our own language. In the second section, I shall examine its interlinguistic version, when it applies to the translation of foreign languages. According to Quine, the case that brings out most clearly the consequences of the indeterminacy thesis is the translation of a radical foreign language, that is, one utterly unknown to us. For this reason, I begin the second section by analyzing this case. Afterwards, I briefly look at the translation of familiar foreign languages. In the third section of the

chapter, I summarize the results of my analysis of the indeterminacy thesis and draw some consequences from it. In the fourth section I show why the mere supposition that there can be incompatible translations of the same sentences does not make sense. The fifth section deals with the thesis of the inscrutability of reference. Firstly, I intend to show that the same ideas used to argue against the indeterminacy claim can be applied to the examination of the inscrutability thesis. Secondly, I make use of Wittgenstein's ideas about ostensive definition to analyze one of the arguments Quine offers in support of the inscrutable character of reference. Lastly, I point out, in passing, that in discussing this claim, Quine seems to embrace implicitly a notion of meaning very much like Wittgenstein's, which would be inconsistent with both the indeterminacy and the inscrutability thesis.

I.

According to Quine, non-standard (non-homophonic) translations of sentences of our own language can in principle be made compatible with the totality of our past and future speech dispositions by means of adjustments in the translation of other sentences in the language. The reason is that there is no evidence, in terms of our dispositions to assent and dissent under certain conditions of stimulation, to rule out a deviant translation of our words. Here we can ask: what would it be like to construe a non-homophonic scheme of translation for English into English and imagine it applied to ourselves?.

Even though Quine does not provide examples of non-homophonic translations of English sentences, it is worth emphasizing that the strength of the indeterminacy thesis does not rest on the availability of such examples, but on the fact that there is no fact of the matter (nothing in

our verbal dispositions) on the basis of which we could choose one specific rendering, given different competing translations. However, for the purposes of the present discussion, we can use the example Quine gives to illustrate the inscrutability of reference to construe some instances of non-homophonic translations of a sentence. Thus, the sentence "Rabbits are molecular organisms" could be rendered in different ways, namely, as "Rabbit stages are molecular organisms", "Brief temporal segments of rabbits are molecular organisms" or "The rabbithood is a molecular organism". All these translations of the original expression are compatible with our speech dispositions.

Is there a way to argue for the determinacy of intralinguistic translation?. I think that this can be done by making use of Wittgenstein's conception of meaning. The main point I shall try to make against Quine is that the fact that non-homophonic translations of our sentences happen to fit our verbal dispositions, as conceived by him, does not mean that such renderings are valid or permissible. We need a distinction between, on the one hand, the compatibility of a translation with the kind of semantic evidence Quine accepts and, on the other, its being a correct rendering. Given this distinction, it can be argued that there is a way to decide which of two or more incompatible translations is correct. If this is so, the meaning of the sentences of language is determinate.

Let's suppose that when I utter the expression "Rabbits are molecular organisms", someone interprets me homophonically, that is, as saying that rabbits are molecular organisms, and other person as saying that brief temporal segments of rabbits are molecular organisms. It can be granted that at the level of our (Quinean) verbal dispositions there is no reason to favor one of these translations over the other, since they are equally compatible with such dispositions. However, following

Wittgenstein, it can be affirmed that the non-homophonic rendering of "Rabbits are molecular organisms" would be discarded on the basis of our ordinary use of language. Thus, this translation would in fact be a violation of the rule for the use of the term "rabbit", according to which we apply this term to certain "enduring and relatively homogenous objects" (to put it in Quine's own terms), but not to brief temporal segments of them([43]). This rule for the use of "rabbit" is precisely what would count against the alternative (non-homophonic) translation of the sentence in question. If someone were to say that we could perfectly well be speaking of brief temporal segments of rabbits when we say that rabbits are molecular organisms, we would say that he is breaching the rules governing the use of "rabbit".

But then it can be said that what someone means by the utterance of a certain sentence is determinate and that one can be right or wrong about it (one could be wrong, for example, if one were not familiar with some of the words that appear in the expression). The meaning of the sentence is thus determined by the rules that govern its use, the rules which the person uttering the sentence has mastered([44]).

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[43]. For Quine, it is a guiding principle of translation that an enduring and homogenous object is a likely reference of a short expression. But this maxim, though useful in practice, does not rule out alternative translations. It does not have the status of a rule for the use of language.

[44]. In relation to this point, Jane Heal says that Wittgenstein's semantic holism prevents us from rendering our own utterances in bizarre ways. With this in mind, Heal adds that the fact of the matter about meaning is not to be found in the sentences themselves alone, but in the context in which they are pronounced. It is not one single fact, but the whole network of language and associated activities which fix the fact of the matter about meaning. Cf. Heal, *J Fact and Meaning*. In relation to this point, Heal seems not to distinguish between semantic holism and the Wittgensteinian thesis of meaning as use. What prevents us from rendering our own sentences in bizarre ways is the latter and not the former. The reason for this is that even if the meaning of a sentence is determined holistically, and consequently a non-standard translation of it would affect the meaning of other expressions, Quine thinks it is perfectly possible to make the necessary adjustments in the rendering of such expressions in order to accommodate their meaning with that of the sentence that has been translated in a non-standard way.

Nevertheless, it seems that Quine's indeterminacy thesis can be reformulated at the level of linguistic rules. It could be said that our translation or interpretation of such rules is indeterminate, that, for example, there is no fact of the matter about what we mean by the words: "the term 'rabbit' refers to certain enduring and relatively homogenous objects". Thus, these words could be taken to mean that the term "rabbit" refers to brief temporal segments of certain objects, and there would be nothing in our speech dispositions to rule out this interpretation. It seems then that Quine's thesis can be reformulated again and again and that there is no way out of it. However, to hold that there can be different translations of linguistic rules presupposes that when we grasp a rule we interpret it. If we assume this, then in fact there does not seem to be a way to avoid the implications of the indeterminacy thesis, since our interpretations of linguistic rules can vary radically and still be compatible with our verbal dispositions.

The question we need to ask here is: Is our grasping of a rule an act of interpretation?. The answer, according to Wittgenstein, is negative. In the famous section 201 of the *Philosophical Investigations*, he says that there is a way of grasping a rule that is not an interpretation, "but which is exhibited in what we call 'obeying the rule' and 'going against it' in actual cases". If we take this seriously, it follows that not all the translations of linguistic rules are permissible or valid, since not all are in accordance with the way we actually speak. In consequence, the meaning of such norms is perfectly determinate.

It might be said that it is possible that we used language in a way other than how we normally do. Clearly, this possibility should be granted. If our linguistic training were different, or if we reacted in another way to

the present teaching of language, it could turn out, say, that we applied the word "red" to yellow objects. However, given the way we are taught to use language and the fact that we agree in our reactions to the linguistic training, any deviant application of words constitutes a violation of grammatical rules. The reason is that, as Wittgenstein remarks, our form of life has to be accepted as "the given", since it is there where the explanations about the use of language come to an end. Therefore, it does not make sense to say that there is no fact of the matter about the meaning of our sentences, since this amounts to saying that our form of life cannot settle the questions about our use of language definitively. In sum, the Wittgensteinian way of refuting the indeterminacy thesis is, in these terms, to face the Quinean with the actual use of language, and to make him realize that it is there where meaning is to be looked for. Such use is perfectly determinate and beyond it there is nothing to be explained. I shall come back to this in section IV of next chapter.

II.

Let's now turn to the analysis of the indeterminacy thesis when applied to the rendering of foreign languages. According to the interlinguistic version of this thesis, there is no fact of the matter about the meaning of the sentences of the object language (the one to be translated). Two distinct manuals of translation can render the same sentence in different and even incompatible ways. Quine remarks that in the case of two familiar languages, like English and French, we may fail to notice the indeterminacy because of the resemblances between them and the long established overall agreement about an standard rendering, despite the slight differences that can exist among the various manuals available. Then, in order to make the indeterminacy of translation clear, Quine sets up the

thought experiment of radical translation, where what is to be rendered is a wholly unknown language. I shall analyze separately the cases of translation of a familiar and of an unfamiliar language, given that, as will be clear later on, different consequences follow from them.

In broad outline the thought experiment of radical translation is set up as follows: suppose an English-speaking linguist discovers an unknown native community whose language is wholly alien to us. The linguist starts to work out a "jungle-to-English dictionary and grammar" to communicate with the natives. Thus, he begins by correlating some native expressions with the concurrent observable circumstances that seem to prompt their utterances. In this way, the linguist eventually manages to come up with some preliminary translations of native occasion sentences, which are continually checked out by their success or failure to allow fluent communication with the natives. Once some sentences of this kind have been rendered successfully, the linguist goes on to translate other expressions, like general terms and logical connectives, less directly connected with sensory stimulations([45]). Gradually, he attempts to render abstract sentences and high theoretical expressions, based on the previous translations already achieved, until the dictionary is completed. What this situation is meant to bring out is that different linguists can come up with dictionaries that can fit the natives' verbal dispositions and still specify incompatible translations of numerous sentences.

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[45]. Thus, it is by reference to the natives' assent and dissent from combinations of occasion sentences that the radical translator can figure out which of the words of the alien language play the role of our logical connectives. For instance, the criterion to identify the native word for negation is that it turns an expression to which the informants would assent into one from which they would dissent, and vice versa. Similarly, in the case of the conjunctive connective the linguist has to find the word that produces compounds of expressions they assent to only when they are prepared to assent to each of their components.

At this point, it is worth making a short digression to consider certain maxims Quine states that are supposed to guide the linguist's work. They are roughly the following. First, the "principle of continuity" affirms that successive utterances may be expected to have some bearing on one another. Second, the "principle of charity" states that it is advisable not to render a native assertion into an obvious falsehood. Bad translations are likelier to be the causes of obvious falsehoods than irrational beliefs on the part of the natives. Third, one should ascribe to the interpretees thoughts that are consistent with their way of life. E.g., it would seem that the degree of complexity in the various kind of activities that form part of the natives' way of life hint at the type of thoughts that is sensible to attribute to them. Thus, it is highly unlikely that primitive people hold complex beliefs about themselves, the external world, etc. Fourth, one should avoid complicating excessively the grammar of the object language. Sometimes the linguist has to choose whether to accept a certain amount of weirdness in the informants' beliefs in order to keep the grammar of their language simple, or to complicate its structure to make such beliefs conform with his own paradigm of rationality, given that in this case the complexity of the grammar might explain away the apparent oddity of the natives' rational beliefs. In this way, the linguist has to seek a balance between grammatical complexity and rationality that avoids complicating excessively the language's grammar.

Quine's characterization of his method of translation is "empathy". Behind the principles mentioned above lies the idea that in radical translation we should imagine ourselves in the informants' situation and then act in the most natural way to us. Following this guideline, the linguist will surely come up with a translation that will conform with our maxims of rationality, economy and simplicity. I shall come back to this point later on.

Let's go back to our main topic. In order to examine the case of radical translation, I shall elaborate on what Wittgenstein says in sections 206 and 207 of the *Philosophical Investigations*. In these sections he introduces a similar situation to that of the radical translator. Wittgenstein asks us to envisage an explorer who comes to an unknown country with a strange language, which he sets out to interpret. In what circumstances, asks Wittgenstein, we would say that the strangers give orders, understand them, obey them, rebel against them, and so on. That is, when would we say they have a language?. According to Wittgenstein, provided that there are regular connections between their utterances and actions, between what they say and the activities that accompany the noises they make, we can attribute to them the possession of a language. However, it must be added, in order for us to take such regular connections as justifying this attribution, the connections have to be of the same kind as those between our utterances and actions. Thus:

> The common behaviour of mankind is the system of reference by means of which we interpret an unknown language([46]).

In other words, as long as we and the natives share the same form of life ("common behaviour of mankind"), it is possible for us to interpret their utterances. And if the words and expressions of both languages are related in the same way to the same kind of activities, that is, if they are used similarly, we can say that they have the same meaning([47]).

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[46]. Wittgenstein, L *Philosophical...* Sect 206

[47]. This does not mean that the English and the native communities share all their language games. In fact, the latter is likely not to practise a good number of activities that are characteristic of developed societies.

To make this point clearer, let's assume, as Quine does, that the interpretees assent to the question "Gavagai?" every time they see a rabbit and dissent from it when no rabbit is present. Further, suppose they point to the rabbit and not to the cat next to it when queried where the gavagai is, and that they try to comfort their rabbit pet when the linguist somehow makes them aware that it has been hurt. If the natives behave towards rabbits as we do, that is, if they use "gavagai" as we use "rabbit", namely, under similar situations, and if they react to its utterance in different contexts as we react to the utterance of "rabbit" in similar contexts, then it can be assumed that we and the natives share the same form of life and that "rabbit" is the right rendering for "gavagai". In that case, the meaning of the natives' expressions is determined.

Again, the fact that we human beings share a form of life guarantees that the same type of words, for instance terms for sensations or animals, are used in a similar way whatever the language. And if they are used similarly, they have the same meaning. Thus, deviant alternative translations of the natives' utterances should be ruled out on the basis of actual behaviour. If a certain dictionary were to propose that the one-word sentence "Gavagai" is to be translated as "There are brief temporal segments of rabbit on the spot", this manual would be at odds with the ordinary use of terms for kinds of animals to refer to "enduring and relatively homogenous" entities([48]).

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[48]. It is worth quoting at length here what Christopher Hookway says in relation to this point, since it has some resemblance to our considerations. "Quine's argument must rest upon rejecting the demand that a translation manual or theory of meaning should contribute to a satisfying explanation of speaker's verbal behaviour". Some of Quine's alternative translations of "gavagai" lead to attribute to the natives "a very curious psychology", that is, desires and beliefs that are psychologically absurd. Thus, according to Quine, it might be said that the natives "are perceptually sensitive to undetached rabbit parts without being perceptually sensitive to rabbits; they go to the supermarket to buy undetached rabbits parts because they desire to eat undetached rabbit part pie (...). Quine's conception of the facts which are relevant for translation fails to account for the role of such considerations in choice of translation manual. Our understanding of human perceptual capacities, of the nature of human desire, and of the psychology of reasoning and

It will be remembered that Quine makes a point apparently similar to Wittgenstein's about the relation between form of life and permissibility of translations, when he (Quine) speaks of the maxims that are supposed to guide the linguist in his task of working out a jungle-to-English dictionary. According to these maxims, which he sums up as empathy, the only way to come up with a manual that does not ascribe to the natives bizarre beliefs or a complicated grammar is to suppose that they act as we do, that their actions and beliefs conform with our own standards of rationality([49]). Thus, any ascription to the interpretees of weird or contradictory beliefs is to be explained away as the result of a bad translation. It should be stressed that, for Quine, these guiding principles of translation, though useful in practice, do not rule out the possibility of alternative and incompatible renderings of the same sentences. Let us note some points about Quine's method of empathy for translation.

First, from Wittgenstein's perspective, it is not a methodological assumption that the natives behave in a rational way but a fact that the linguist is likely to discover when he undertakes to interpret the native

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deliberation - as well as sociological and anthropological information - all seem relevant to choice of translation manual. The arguments for translational indeterminacy depend upon ignoring all these factors. It is almost as if Quine had moved from the obvious truth that the evidence for translation consists solely of behaviour to the far more questionable claim that a translation manual is correct so long as it 'fits' the behaviour. It seems plain that among the manuals which fit behaviour, some will serve better than others as a means to finding satisfying explanations of behaviour". Hookway, C *Quine* pp 158-159. The factors Hookway thinks to be relevant for translation can be said to be part of our shared form of life.

[49]. In relation to this point, Jane Heal says that Quine imposes two holistic constraints or conditions of intelligibility on any translation. On the one hand, "someone can be intelligible if we can see him to be thinking, in part at least, about the world we share with him. If his thoughts were solely about things which were entirely inaccessible to us we would never make any sense of him". On the other hand, "he cannot be seen as thinking about anything at all unless he can be made out to be at least minimally rational. He must exhibit some pattern that allows us to see him as reasoning, however, misguidedly". See Heal, J *Op Cit.* p 100.

language. Second, if the natives behave rationally (according to our standards), their use of language must be similar to ours. The reason is that, if we interpret them as employing "gavagai" to refer to brief temporal segments of rabbits, or to rabbithood, as opposed to rabbits, we should have to ascribe to them weird beliefs such that rabbithood-hunting should be banned, and weird intentions, such as that of cooking a brief temporal segment of rabbit pie. Lastly, from the Wittgensteinian perspective, unlike Quine's, the fact that our use of "rabbit" is similar to the natives' use of "gavagai" would determine the correct rendering of this term and of sentences containing it.

The case for the indeterminacy of translation could be pressed by claiming that the thesis at issue is meant to apply when translating the language of a primitive community whose form of life is alien to us. In this case we must envisage two possible situations. First, it could turn out that the connections between the utterances and the actions of the community members were chaotic, that such connections were not systematic or regular. In such a situation we would say that the natives do not have a language. In this respect Wittgenstein remarks:

> Let us imagine that the people in that country carried on the usual human activities and in the course of them employed, apparently, an articulate language. If we watch their behaviour we find it intelligible, it seems "logical". But when we try to learn their language we find it impossible to do so. For there is no regular connexion between what they say, the sounds they make, and their actions(....)
> Are we to say that these people have a language: orders, reports, and the rest?
> There is not enough regularity for us to call it a "language"([50]).

[50]. Wittgenstein, L *Philosophical*... Sec 207.

It can be said that the degree of regularity between linguistic and non-linguistic behaviour necessary for the ascription of language must be similar to that shown in our own use of language. Of course, there is no way to draw a line here.

In the second situation, we envisage the natives to display in their behaviour enough regularity to attribute to them some kind of linguistic competence, but the connections between what they say and do is wholly alien to us. For example, suppose that their linguistic reactions to the suffering of other people are not generally associated, as in our case, with an attitude of consolation towards, say, the person in pain, but with some strange and random bodily movements. What are we to say in this case, i.e., where the natives behave in utterly deviant ways from what we regard to be the common behaviour of mankind?. The first thing to be noted here is that since we are assuming the natives' behaviour is not chaotic and that, consequently, they have a language, we are endowing them with a certain form of life, no matter how bizarre for us this can be. (As Wittgenstein says: "And to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life"([51])). In such a situation, we may envisage two possible scenarios. In the first one, distinct interpretations of the native sentences would be possible. The meaning of these expressions would have to be grasped from their contexts of utterance and the activities associated with them, which would be unfamiliar to us. In consequence, different interpretations of such contexts and activities would be possible, and thereby incompatible renderings of the same sentences too. Hence, translation would be underdetermined.

But here it can be asked, why does the fact that the linguist does not share the form of life of the community

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[51]. *Ibid.* Sec 19.

to be interpreted underdetermine the translation of the native sentences?. The reason is that the linguist does not understand the linguistic practices of the community members because he was never drawn into the community; he learnt other practices. In other words, the linguist is an outsider relative to the native community. In order for him to be an insider of it, he "would have to be brought up (as it were) all over again", he would have to be trained in the relevant use of language, to employ words under different contexts and associated with distinct activities([52]). The linguist would begin by imitating the natives' verbal and non-verbal behaviour. Afterwards, he would have his behaviour reinforced or corrected by them. In this way, eventually, he would manage to master the relevant linguistic practices([53]). Clearly, to become an insider of a different form of life would not be at all like learning an ordinary new game or another language. What stands between the linguist and the native form of life is something that cannot be bridged by means of explanations or through an intellectual process. In consequence, if the linguist does not share the native form of life, he can only put forward the interpretation he thinks best fits the meaning of the natives' verbal behaviour. However, according to Wittgenstein, interpretations by themselves do not fix meaning. If we are not users of a certain language nor participants of the practices it is associated with, our interpretations of its words and sentences "hang in the air along with what it interprets"([54]). And in this sense, they underdetermine meaning. Finally, it would seem that the more dissimilar we imagine the form of life of a community to be to ours, the

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[52]. Valberg, J *Op Cit.* p 182.

[53]. In the last analysis, it is an empirical question whether we can be linguistically retrained and be drawn into a different form of life.

[54]. Wittgenstein, L *Philosophical...* Sec 198.

more room there is likely to be for underdetermination of translation.

In the second scenario, we suppose that the linguist cannot come up with any hypothetical translation of the native expressions([55]). In this case, it can be said that since it makes sense to attribute to the natives the possession of a language, there is something their expressions mean, about which we cannot form any hypothesis. Therefore, even though we do not know what such expressions mean, we are entitled to suppose that their meaning is determinate.

Let's now briefly examine the case of translation of familiar languages. The results of our analysis of the intralinguistic version of the indeterminacy thesis and of radical translation can be applied directly to this case. In the case of people with whom we share a common form of life, the meaning of their expressions is perfectly determined. As in the case of our own language, what, say, French people mean by the utterance of a certain sentence is established by the use they make of such an expression, and since the English-speaking community to which the translator belongs employs, say, the words for animals in the same way as the interpretees do, the meaning of the French terms for animals is the same as the meaning of the respective English words. Thus, it is the fact that French people use language, generally speaking, as we do, that prevents us from translating "*lapin*" into "rabbit stages" or "rabbithood".

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[55]. This is the position adopted by Kirk. He argues that if two communities had a different form of life, they would use their language in a different way, which would prevent any translation between the languages. Hence, there would not be room for indeterminacy of translation. Cf. Kirk, R *Op Cit*. pp 213-214.

III.

To summarize, the results of our analysis of the indeterminacy thesis are the following: First, we reached the conclusion that, in the intralinguistic case, translation and meaning are perfectly determined. Second, we concluded that the translations of, on the one hand, an alien language spoken by people who share our form of life, and on the other hand, of familiar languages, are determined, and thereby so does the meaning of the sentences of such languages. Third, I argued that if we imagine a community whose verbal behaviour is associated with a set of practices alien to our form of life, then, even though we can presume there is something their utterances mean, since there is a regular connection between what they say and what they do, it can turn out either that various incompatible renderings of the object sentences are possible, or that the linguist cannot come up with any rendering. In the first case, translation is underdetermined. In the second, although we do not have the slightest idea about the meaning of the native sentences, we are entitled to suppose is determinate.

According to Quine, the thought experiment of radical translation is meant to make clear the otherwise striking and counterintuitive intralinguistic version of the indeterminacy thesis. As he puts it, "only radical translation exposes the poverty of ultimate data for the identification of meanings"([56]). Thus, for Quine, the intralinguistic indeterminacy is just a special case of the general thesis of the indeterminacy of translation. However, if our analysis is right, this does not hold. Instead, it can be said that the determinacy of the meaning of our own expressions is based on the same fact as the determinacy of translation of foreign languages, namely,

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[56]. Quine, V "Indeterminacy..." p 7.

the sharing of a common form of life. To put it in another way, if the words and sentences of a language are used in the same way as those of our own (and even if they are not, but the connection between what the interpretees say and do is regular enough for us to ascribe them a language), the meaning of the foreign expressions is determinate. Thus, in translating a language we match words of the two languages that play the same role, that is, that are used in the same way.

The philosophical relevance of the indeterminacy thesis is that it purports to show that there is no fact of the matter about the meaning of the sentences of any language and, consequently, that there is no such thing as sameness of meaning, if conceived as something different from sameness of stimulus meaning. However, our analysis seems to show that translation and meaning are determined. The only case in which translation may be underdetermined is when rendering the language of a community with a different form of life. But this underdetermination, though empirically interesting, does not dictate Quine's conclusion.

Another implication of our analysis of the indeterminacy thesis is that the supposed possibility of alternative translations rests, in the last analysis, on a separation of sentences from their ordinary use. If such separation is made, then it is possible to translate expressions in many incompatible ways, since there is no principled reason to favor one over the others. For Quine, indeterminacy of translation means that many renderings are possible. However, appealing now to Wittgenstein, it seems that the consequence of disconnecting meaning and use is the elimination of any translation. Given that there is no paradigm on the basis of which we can judge the correctness of different translations, the notions of "right" and "wrong" as applied to them disappear. But if there is no

right and wrong about what someone means by a given expression and every translation can be made to accord with the natives' verbal dispositions, then no rendering can be made to accord with them. I shall develop this point further in section IV of the last chapter.

IV.

An important argument against the indeterminacy thesis that can be extracted from Wittgenstein's conception of language is that this thesis is nonsensical. In this section I shall show the reasons that support this conclusion.

According to Quine, indeterminacy not only affects radical translation, but also the meaning of the sentences of our own (and any) language. But here we can ask: What does it mean to say that there is no fact of the matter about the meaning of the sentences of any language, about, say, what an English speaker means by the utterance of a given expression?.

Before trying to answer this question, I should say some words about what the indeterminacy thesis does not mean. In the first chapter, I mentioned some possible misinterpretations of this thesis. The most important points made in that chapter were that the thesis at issue should be distinguished from the epistemological claims that meaning is underdetermined by present or by all possible behavioural data. Likewise, to hold the indeterminacy of meaning does not amount to claim that in some cases it is not clear whether a certain word applies to an object, like in the borderline cases of colours, where it is not evident what the colour of the object is, since semantic indeterminacy is meant to apply to our whole language and not only to special cases of semantic ambiguity. As I point out below, the indeterminacy thesis

should be also distinguished from the skeptical claim that there is no way for us to get to know the meaning of the expressions of language.

But, then, what does the indeterminacy thesis amount to?. A first thing that should be noted is that in formulating his thesis, Quine cannot but be making use of public language. Then, the only meaning he can give to the word "meaning" is the one it has in public language. We do not, Quine included, have other resources to speak of meaning than our ordinary notion of "meaning". Philosophers do not have "super concepts" by means of which they formulate their theories([57]). According to our ordinary concept of "meaning", to mean is to mean something in particular, one thing rather than other one. This is a grammatical fact about the language-game of meaning something. In consequence, to say that there is no fact of the matter about what an English speaker means by the utterance of a given expression amounts to saying that he does not mean something in particular by such an expression (this rather than other thing).

Clearly, the indeterminacy thesis conflicts with the grammar of our ordinary notion of "meaning". To say that there is no fact of the matter about the meaning of the sentences of language is to contradict the grammar of this notion. And it is the only notion of meaning Quine *has*. So what he is saying is nonsense. And indeed, if someone were just to put to you like that, that we never mean one thing versus another, this would strike you as nonsense.

So, from Wittgenstein's perspective, that there is a fact of the matter about what we mean is a grammatical truth. That there is a fact of the matter is not a contingent fact we discover by means of an empirical

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[57]. See Wittgenstein, L *Philosophical...* Sec 97.

investigation and that could turn out not to be the case. In this way; it is part of the grammar of "meaning", a rule of our system of language games. Given that such system constitutes the perspective from which we think and make sense of things, our acceptance of its rules cannot be justified, we cannot give grounds for it([58]). We cannot help accepting them, since they are like paradigms against which we judge people's mastery of language.

Of course, in *some* cases we may not know what is the fact of the matter about what someone means; but our ignorance about it does not mean that there *is* no such a fact. Even a sentence like "I'm so confused that I don't know what I mean" makes perfect sense when uttered under certain particular circumstances. The fact that sometimes we may not know what someone means should be distinguished from what the skeptical position holds. According to this, even though the meaning of the sentences of a given language could be determinate, we cannot get to know it because it is always possible to raise doubts as to whether someone means this rather than that by a certain expression, and, most importantly, there is no way to settle the question definitively.

From what has been said in this section, it is clear that Wittgenstein's conception of meaning should not be taken as providing us with a "solution" to the problem raised by Quine's indeterminacy thesis, since this would involve accepting the general framework of Quine's analysis of meaning in terms of verbal dispositions, semantic evidence, stimulus meaning and so on, which, from Wittgenstein's perspective, is wrong-headed([59]). Instead, I think Wittgenstein's conception of meaning can be used to dissolve the seeming possibility of different translations

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[58]. Cf. Valberg, J *Op Cit.* p 183.

[59]. On this cf. chapter 4 section IV below.

of the same sentences and, consequently, to show that there is no reason whatsoever to think that meaning is indeterminate in the first place. And, most importantly, Wittgenstein ideas about language-games and linguistic rules remind us of what we already know: that to hold that there is no fact of the matter about what we mean is nonsense.

V.

One of the reasons Quine offers in support of the indeterminacy of translation thesis is the claim that the reference of terms is inscrutable, that is, that there is no fact of the matter about the extension of any singular term or predicate. Hence, extension is indeterminate. I think the same considerations about meaning and use that we employed in criticizing the former, apply to the latter. According to the grammar of our public concept of "reference" (the only one we have) reference is determinate. To say that "A refers to B", where "A" is a name and "B" an entity, is to say that A refers to something in particular, to B rather than to C or D. Hence, it is nonsensical to hold that reference is indeterminate. Thus, it can be said that our common linguistic practices fix the reference of terms, and these practices, in conjunction with the former grammatical fact about our notion of "reference", rule out the possibility of alternative deviant interpretations of such references. In this way, "gavagai" refers to rabbits and not to brief temporal segments of rabbits because, on the one hand, the natives use, as we do, names for kinds of animals to refer to entities considered as a wholes rather than to segments of them (and beyond this use there is nothing to account for), and on the other hand, because to refer to something in particular means not to refer to something else.

As we saw above, Quine holds that in order to avoid attributing to the natives irrational thoughts, the linguist should suppose they behave according to our paradigm of rationality.

> When from the sameness of stimulus meanings of "Gavagai" and "Rabbit" the linguist leaps to the conclusion that a gavagai is a whole enduring rabbit, he is just taking for granted that the native is enough like us to have a brief general term for rabbits and no brief general term for rabbit stages or parts([60]).

But this (Quine says) is just a methodological assumption. Thus, nothing stands in the way of there being alternative renderings of "gavagai" according to which this term would refer to, say, brief temporal segments of rabbits. In contrast, for Wittgenstein, the linguist does not *assume* for methodological purposes that the natives are like us. Instead, this is something highly probable given that we human beings have a common natural history and share a form of life. And this, together with the grammatical fact about our notion of "reference" I mentioned above, rules out any alternative deviant translation of the natives' terms.

There are other arguments Quine gives in favor of the thesis of the inscrutability of terms which are worth examining. In this connection, I shall make use of what Wittgenstein says about ostensive definition.

When discussing the inscrutability of reference, Quine points out that it could be thought that this arises from a fault in the formulation of our notion of "stimulus meaning", which could be remedied by pointing to the object in question and asking the informant whether he is referring to a single gavagai or to parts of it. Against

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[60]. Quine, V *Word and Object*. p 52.

> We may say: only someone who already knows how to do something with it can significantly ask a name([61]).

As is clear from these quotations, some bit of knowledge is always necessary for ostensive definitions to work. In relation to the terms for kinds of animals, it can be said that, according to our linguistic practices, they are used to refer to (in Quine's terms) enduring and continuous entities. If we know this, then the act of pointing to a rabbit together with the utterance "That's a rabbit", fix for us the reference of "rabbit". In the case where the natives employ the different types of words of their language in the same way as we do with ours, we can conclude that if they assent to the query "gavagai?" when the linguist points to a rabbit, then they use "gavagai" to refer to rabbits and not to brief temporal segments of rabbits. In this way, contrary to what Quine holds, ostensive definitions do help us to fix the reference of terms. As we have said, what lies behind this sameness of uses is the fact that our linguistic training and that of the natives is the same, and that we and the natives react to it in the same way. If the trainings or the reactions were not the same, the former would no doubt have different results, then "rabbit" and "gavagai" would not be co-referential terms. On the other hand, in the case where the natives have a different form of life from ours, and regardless of whether the linguists can come up with different translations of the terms of their language or with none, we are entitled to suppose that the reference of such terms is determinate, since we do attribute to the natives the possession of a language.

I need to distinguish here between ostensive definition and ostensive teaching of words. As we saw above, ostensive definition requires a certain linguistic competence, if it

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[61]. Wittgenstein, L *Philosophical...* Sec 31.

is to work. On the other hand, linguistic ostensive teaching is the method by means of which we teach the use of words to children who are not familiar with the overall role of such words in language. This method consists basically of pointing gestures and expressions aimed at fixing the child's attention to the sample (or aspect of it) that is being used to teach the term in question. Wittgenstein illustrates this as follows:

> An important part of the training will consist in the teacher's pointing to the objects, directing the child's attention to them, and at the same time uttering a word; for instance, the word "slab" as he points to that shape([62]).

Wittgenstein points out that someone who came into an strange country would learn some of the words of the community by ostensive explanations that the inhabitants would give to him, since, at the beginning, he would not be familiar with the overall role of the native words (which is bound to be the same as that of the corresponding English words)([63]). The outsider would often have to guess the meaning of such explanations, which he would do "sometimes right, sometimes wrong". Thus, for example, he could in the first instance take "gavagai" to be the native word for "white". But after some extra ostensive pointings, he would eventually hit the right interpretation and translate "gavagai" as "rabbit". The important thing to be noted here is that this guessing of the meaning of the natives' ostensive explanations can be right or wrong, that is, there is something about which we can guess correctly

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[62]. Wittgenstein, L *Ibid.* Sec 6.

[63]. Actually, Wittgenstein says that the person who comes into the strange community would be given *ostensive definitions*. However, what he says becomes clearer if we take him to mean *ostensive explanations*, given that in order for the person to understand such definitions, he would have to be somehow already familiarized with the native language. In any case, this modification is irrelevant to the point I make about Wittgenstein's implicit rejection of the thesis of the inscrutability of terms. Cf Wittgenstein, L *Ibid.* Sec 32.

or not. This "something" is the reference of the native words.

Finally, in passing, we should note that, in places, Quine seems to embrace implicitly a notion of meaning very much like Wittgenstein's. E.g., when Quine affirms that reference is relative to a background theory within which the words of a language are assigned a referent, he adds that although we can question the ontological assumptions of such theory, discussions about reference are solved "by acquiescing in our mother tongue and taking its words at face value"([64]). In the actual practice of language controversies as to the reference of terms do not arise given that there is a widespread use of words about which the speakers implicitly agree. Thus, we acquiesce in our mother tongue because we are members of the same linguistic community and learn to use language in the same way, which is, roughly, what Wittgenstein holds. But then (if we take seriously this acquiescing), it seems that there is no room for inscrutability of reference nor indeterminacy of meaning, since any deviant interpretation of our words, or of the sentences of the language of a community that shares our form of life, would be discarded on the grounds that it deviates from our ordinary and agreed use of language.

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[64]. Quine,V "Ontological Relativity" in *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays*. p 64.

CHAPTER FOUR

WITTGENSTEIN, LINGUISTIC RULES AND QUINE'S LINGUISTIC BEHAVIOURISM

In the last chapter I applied Wittgenstein's conception of meaning to the analysis of Quine's indeterminacy thesis. In the present chapter, I shall make use of this conception to criticize Quine's linguistic behaviourism (one of the main supports of the indeterminacy thesis) and to show that this doctrine falls short of providing a satisfactory account of meaning. This critique follows from a Wittgensteinian argument that can be used against the indeterminacy thesis, which I mentioned briefly in the last chapter and I develop here([65]).

To this end, I shall, in the first section, give a brief characterization of Quine's linguistic behaviourism and his rejection of mentalistic accounts of meaning. The second section will be devoted to spelling out both Wittgenstein's dismissal of mentalistic and behaviouristic semantic explanations. The purpose of this is to make clear that, on the one hand, Wittgenstein and Quine share an animadversion towards "semantic mentalism", and on the other hand, that Wittgenstein denies that meaning can be explained in terms of behaviour. In the third section I shall spell out the necessary a-posteriori character that linguistic rules have within Wittgenstein's conception of meaning. Finally, I shall make use of the Wittgensteinian notion of "linguistic

[65]. Cf. chapter 3, section III.

rule" to criticize Quine's indeterminacy thesis and linguistic behaviourism.

I.

In his paper "Indeterminacy of Translation Again", Quine affirms that the indeterminacy thesis is the natural consequence of behaviourism, the only possible approach to linguistics. This becomes clear, says Quine, if we look at the way language is acquired. The only resource we have for learning a language is the observation of other people's verbal behaviour and the circumstances under which this takes place. Thus:

> There is nothing to linguistic meaning, then, beyond what is to be gleaned from overt behaviour in observable circumstances([66]).

And what is to be gleaned from there are certain dispositions to assent and dissent from sentences under determinate stimulations. Thus, the meaning of an occasion sentence is the complex of dispositions to assent and dissent from it in response to present stimulation.

Quine's linguistic behaviourism is reinforced by his rejection of mentalistic accounts of meaning. Quine holds that there are three different types of explanation: mental, physiological and behavioural. Explanations of the first kind, he says, reify meanings, since they postulate that meanings are mental entities that exist in a special realm. Such entities are sometimes taken to be ideas or other mental items. Quine claims that this hypostatization fails to explain what the meaning of a sentence is. However, the appeal of the mentalistic accounts resides in the fact that they seem to account for phenomena like our

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[66]. Quine, V "Indeterminacy..." p 5.

understanding of expressions and sameness of meaning. According to the mentalistic perspective, to understand an expression is to know or to grasp its meaning. Similarly, the fact that a sentence translates another one is explained in terms of both having the same meaning. In both cases, meanings are conceived as some kind of entities that can be grasped and be had by expressions. But this common way of talking of meanings, Quine says, is unjustified and obscure. Hence, we should avoid such idioms and speak simply of understanding a sentence and of equivalence of expressions. Given that mentalistic explanations are to be dismissed, meaning should be analyzed then in behaviouristic terms, since we do not yet possess a physiological explanation of it([67]).

II.

Wittgenstein's conception of meaning as use constitutes an straightforward attack against any account of meaning in terms of mental items like states, processes or entities. The dismissal of mentalistic explanations is one of the main topics in Wittgenstein's later philosophy. Thus, a good number of sections in the *Philosophical Investigations* are aimed at showing the inadequacy of this type of explanations. Here are some examples:

> When I think in language, there aren't "meanings" going through my mind in addition to the verbal expressions: the language is itself the vehicle of thought([68]).
>
> "When I teach someone the formation of the series (....) I surely mean him to write (....) at the

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[67]. For Quine, physiological accounts are causal and constitute the most scientific way of explanation. It is reasonable to expect, he says, that someday our behavioural dispositions can be given a physiological account. Cf. Quine, V. "Mind and Verbal Dispositions" in *Meaning and Reference*.

[68]. Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical...* Sec 329.

> hundredth place". Quite right; you mean it. And evidently without necessarily thinking of it. This shews you how different the grammar of the verb "to mean" is from that of "to think". And nothing is more wrong-headed than calling meaning a mental activity!. Unless, that is, one is setting out to produce confusion([69]).
>
> Meaning it is not a process which accompanies a word. For no process could have the consequences of meaning([70]).

Wittgenstein's attack on the mentalistic accounts of meaning is closely linked with his analysis of propositional-attitude verbs such as "to know", "to understand", "to think" and so forth. Based on the idea that there is an internal connection between the way in which words are incorporated in language and their meaning, that is, on the thesis of meaning as use, he holds that expressions like: "Now I know how to continue the series", "I have finally been able to understand his attitude" or "I didn't mean it that way", are neither reports nor descriptions of internal process or states. The reason is that the propositional-attitudes verbs were not introduced in language in order to fulfill these roles. The examination of the contexts in which these verbs are employed shows that they serve rather different purposes. Thus, the sentence "Now I know how to continue the series" may mean various things depending on the context within which it is uttered and of what is going on in it. For example, it may mean that the person in question is quite capable of carrying out the progression if he or she is asked to do so. In this case the expression is a sign of understanding or of having acquired a certain ability. Likewise, this sentence might only be a way of stressing the simplicity of the operation, another way of saying: "That is dead easy", if pronounced with a certain tone. The elucidation of how propositional-attitude verbs are

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[69]. *Ibid.* Sec 693.

[70]. *Ibid.* p 218.

employed in everyday life shows that they are neither used as descriptions of, nor make reference to, supposed phenomena which would take place inside us each time we know, understand, think, mean something and so forth.

Another aspect of Wittgenstein's criticism of mentalism has to do with the idea that what is relevant for the ascription of propositional attitudes to people are the external criteria by which we can tell if a person is, say, desiring, fearing or expecting something on a certain occasion, and not anything that may go on inside of us. The notion of "criteria" includes the most diverse things. Thus, a criterion for the attribution of a certain intention to an individual can be his previous and subsequent actions and verbal behaviour as well as their time and place, or the people to whom the actions were displayed and the utterances addressed. The criteria can also be certain facial gestures and bodily movements, like in the case of the ascription to someone of consciousness and of certain feelings. Thus, Wittgenstein affirms:

> Consciousness in another's face. Look into someone else's face, and see the consciousness in it, and a particular shade of consciousness. You see on it, in it, joy, indifference, interest, excitement, torpor and so on([71]).

As Wittgenstein emphasizes, this does not amount to denying the existence of mental or brain states and processes. What he does hold is that these mental or neural items are irrelevant when it comes to elucidating the meaning of words and expressions. What is to mean something by a certain utterance is not a matter of what is going on in the utterer's mind or brain at the time the utterance is made (from Wittgenstein's standpoint, to mean something by an utterance is to use it in a certain way). These mental or neural happenings do not figure in our explanations of

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[71]. Wittgenstein,L. *Zettel*. Sec 220.

meaning. That is: suppose it were discovered that a certain neural process occurs inside us each time we mean something by the utterance of a sentence. Such a process would be of no use in explaining why we use language in a certain way rather than in another, that is, why we mean one thing rather than something else by such an expression. As Wittgenstein remarks, the discovery of a neural process would only allow us to state that there is a temporal concomitance between what we call "to mean something" and a brain event.

This point about the grammar of our concept of "meaning" is similar to that made by Wittgenstein about the grammar of our words for sensations, where he introduces the metaphor of the beetle in the box to show that "if we construe the grammar of the expression of sensation on the model of 'object and designation' the object drops out of consideration as irrelevant"([72]). He argues that whatever happens inside us has no place or role in the language-game of sensations. The reason is that we can imagine that nothing happens or that something different (or something that is in constant change) happens inside each one of us, and even in these cases terms like "pain" can still have a use in language.

Wittgenstein is aware that his rejection of the mentalistic accounts of meaning could be taken to involve an implicit endorsement of behaviourism([73]). But he distances himself from behaviourism: he dismisses the idea that meaning can be analyzed in terms of behaviour; though he stresses that behaviour plays an important role in some language-games. Consider the ascription to other people of propositional attitudes or feelings. This does not rely exclusively on behaviour, since the same actions and facial

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[72]. Wittgenstein, L *Philosophical...* Sec 293.

[73]. See *Ibid.* Sec 307.

gestures may be the manifestation of different kinds of propositional attitudes or feelings. Fear is not only fear behaviour, nor joy the array of bodily movements and verbal exclamations we associate with it. The fact that a person shows symptoms of nervousness may very well be due to a terrible fear or to the proximity of an event that will fill him with joy. Hence, in order for certain pieces of behaviour to be meaningful and to constitute criteria for the attribution of, say, a belief, it is also necessary to know the context, the circumstances in which the behaviour was displayed. Thus:

> One can say: How can these gestures, this way of holding the hand, this picture, be the wish that such and such were the case? It is nothing more than a hand over a table and there it is, alone and without a sense. Like a single bit of scenery from the production of a play, which has been left by itself in a room. It had life only in the play([74]).

III.

An essential characteristic of linguistic rules is that they are a sort of necessary a-posteriori principles. This feature of linguistic rules is highly relevant for the critique of Quine's linguistic behaviourism I shall make in the next section. The present section is devoted to spell out this necessary a-posteriori character of linguistic rules. I begin by observing that, for Wittgenstein, the formation of linguistic rules and of concepts depends, in the last analysis, on some general facts about our natural history, which explains their a-posteriori character. Afterwards, I then try to bring out the normative role of linguistic rules as paradigms against which we judge people's mastery of language, which accounts for their necessary character. Lastly, I expound the parallel drawn

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[74]. Wittgenstein, L *Zettel*. Sec 238.

by Gordon Baker between following a rule of grammar and measuring objects according to a system. This parallel illustrates others main features of linguistic rules.

According to Wittgenstein, linguistic rules govern the use of language within our language-games. These language-games involve the use of common terms and expressions shared by all the participants in such games. The existence of these common terms and expressions depends on our agreement in certain natural basic forms of behaviour. If every one of us reacted in a radically different way to, say, the ostensive pointings employed in the teaching of some words, if people looked in different directions when someone else tried to direct their attention to a certain object, there would not be common terms, and consequently, nor language-games nor linguistic rules. Thus, for Wittgenstein, the formation of concepts is intimately related to our natural history. If, for example, our physical make up were such that the touch of the fire produced in us a pleasant sensation, the grammar of our concepts of "burning" and related ones would be different. It would not be associated with painful events but would be used to express sensations of pleasure. As Wittgenstein remarks, if there were not general agreement about the correct results of calculations, if, for example, some mathematicians believed that certain figures alter without our perceiving it, we would not have the concept of "mathematical certainty"([75]). Thus,

> I am not saying: if such-and-such facts of nature were different people would have different concepts (in the sense of a hypothesis). But: if anyone believes that certain concepts are absolutely the correct ones, and that having different ones would mean not realizing something that we realize - then let him imagine certain very general facts of nature to be different from what we are used to, and the formation of

[75]. See Wittgenstein, L *Philosophical...* p 225.

> concepts different from the usual ones will become intelligible to him([76]).

Hence, the formation of concepts and of the rules that govern their use depend, in the last analysis, on some general facts about our natural history. But once the rules for the use of a concept get established, they become criteria for the correct application of the concept in question. In this sense, it can be said that linguistic rules are sort of necessary a-posteriori principles, because though they are dependent on certain facts about the human natural history, once fixed they govern the use of language. Linguistic rules are, to use Wittgenstein's own words, like means of representation against which comparisons are made, paradigms against which we judge people's mastery of language and that serve to settle semantic disputes. The character of necessity of linguistic rules arises from this normative role. Their function is thus similar to that of the standard meter, that sets a certain length as the unit of the metric linear measuring system and stands as the last criterion to judge about the correctness of particular acts of measurement([77]).

Gordon Baker draws a parallel between following a rule of grammar and measuring objects according to a certain system, that illustrates some of the main features of linguistic rules. These activities, he says, resemble each other in various aspects([78]). First, they involve some sort of action on the part of the subject. When following rules we are not (as it were) guided passively by them. On the contrary, it is precisely our actions that count as following a rule or going against it. Second, a yardstick and a word do not determine, or contain in themselves, the

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[76]. Wittgenstein, L *Ibid.* p 230.

[77]. Cf. *Ibid.* Sec 50.

[78]. Cf Baker, G "Following a Rule: The Basic Themes" in *Wittgenstein: To Follow a Rule.*

practice of using them in a given way, say, to make measurements and a certain kind of assertions respectively. This highlights the fact that it is the use of words or expressions within their language-games which determines their meaning. Third, the acts of following rules and of measuring presuppose a background of regularities in people's behaviour. Without the base of a common agreement in the results of our measurements and in the way we follow rules, such activities would not be possible. In passing, it is worth mentioning that these three aspects in which the activities of following a grammatical rule and measuring objects resemble each other bring out what Wittgenstein calls the autonomy of the grammar of our language. Linguistic rules can be said to be "arbitrary" insofar as reality does not impose any constraint on the use of expressions([79]). Likewise, it does not impose any restriction on our establishing a particular system of measurement.

IV.

As we saw in the first section of this chapter, according to Quine, behaviourism is the only possible approach to linguistics, since the only resource we have for learning a language is the observation of other people's verbal behaviour together with the stimulatory circumstances that prompt their utterances. This approach is reinforced by Quine's rejection of mentalistic accounts of meaning. Thus, Quine replaces our "old notion of separate and distinct meanings" by that of "stimulus meaning". The consequence of this replacement is semantic indeterminacy.

From the standpoint of Wittgenstein, Quine's behaviouristic approach to linguistics is wrong-headed. The

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[79]. On this cf. Wittgenstein, L *Philosophical...* Secs 496-497.

reason is that Quine seems to move from the acceptable fact that the only resource for learning a language is the observation of other people's verbal behaviour and the circumstances under which it takes place, to the misleading claim that "there is nothing to linguistic meaning (...) beyond what is to be gleaned from overt behaviour in observable circumstances", namely, our verbal dispositions to assent and dissent from sentences under particular stimulations.

Following Wittgenstein, it can be said that these dispositions manifest the rules that govern the use of language. To put it differently, our verbal dispositions are in accordance or conflict with such rules. As Wittgenstein remarks, these rules get shown in the teaching of language, in the day-to-day practice of it and so on([80]). The meaning of a sentence is the rules that govern its use, and not our dispositions to assent and dissent from it. Thus, linguistic rules determine what we mean by the utterance of a particular expression. They determine what can and cannot be said by the words and sentences of our language.

I think that Quine might grant that our verbal dispositions manifest certain linguistic rules and still try to hold his linguistic behaviourism and its consequent semantic indeterminacy. In fact, he seems to do so when he refers to our acquiescing in our mother tongue. This would explain the fact that in the everyday use of language there is agreement about the meaning of sentences, that is, about the rules that govern their use. However, Quine might still say that it is (in principle) possible to interpret our verbal dispositions as manifesting different rules from those we actually acquiesce in. Thus, our disposition to assent to the expression "Is there a rabbit in the garden?"

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[80]. Cf. *Ibid.* Sec 197.

every time there is a rabbit in the garden, could be taken to manifest the rule according to which the word "rabbit" applies to temporal segments of rabbits or to rabbithood. For this reason, there is no fact of the matter about which rule our verbal dispositions manifest.

In order to block the indeterminacy thesis, we need to find a way to show that the rules manifested in the actual use of language rule out the possibility of alternative interpretations of this use (as we shall see, these rules make such interpretations nonsensical). I think that the way to achieve this is to put pressure on the notion of "interpretation" or "translation".

It can be said, following Wittgenstein, that we do not interpret verbal dispositions as manifesting a certain rule. I do not interpret my own or someone else's utterances as following or falling under a given rule (if this were the case, then in effect, there is nothing in our speech dispositions that would prevent us from interpreting them in different ways as manifesting incompatible rules). The reason is that if it were possible to interpret verbal behaviour in different and incompatible ways, then linguistic rules would change accordingly. Every interpretation of our words would involve the postulation of a distinct rule, since we would interpret them as following this or that rule. But it does not make sense to suppose that incompatible linguistic rules can coexist. As we saw some paragraphs back, the rules we acquiesce in have the status of necessary a-posteriori principles that govern the use of language. Conformity to them is what makes a person a competent speaker of a language. In other words, we rate someone as a competent English speaker because he regularly follows correctly these rules([81]). However, if

[81]. At this point the skeptic might ask: "how do we know which rules we acquiesce in?". As I said in section IV of the last chapter, Quine's indeterminacy thesis should be distinguished from the skeptical position, according to which even though there is a fact of the matter about what we

along with the existing rule according to which, say, "rabbit" applies to rabbits, we had another one according to which "rabbit" would apply to temporal segments of rabbits, the first one would cease to be a necessary principle for the ascription of linguistic competence, that is, it would cease to play the role of a paradigm against which we judge people's mastery of the term "rabbit".

This would mean that all linguistic rules would have a non-necessary character. They would govern the use of language under certain interpretations of our utterances, but not under other ones, where different rules would apply. Thus, there would be various rules for the use of, say, the word "rabbit", according to which the sentence "There is a rabbit in the garden" would be interpreted in different ways. The problem here is that we seem to end up with a sort of Wittgensteinian paradox. If different interpretations of our verbal behaviour can be made out to accord with a rule (v.g. the rule for the use of the term "rabbit"), they can also be made out to conflict with it. For instance, if we interpret a person's verbal disposition to assent to the question "Is there a rabbit in the garden?" whenever there are rabbits in the garden, as manifesting the rule that the term "rabbit" applies to temporal segments of rabbits, then this same disposition can be interpreted as manifesting the rule that "rabbit"

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mean, we cannot get to know it, we do not know whether we mean this or that. However, I think that similar considerations to those I have made in relation to Quine's thesis apply to skepticism. From the standpoint of Wittgenstein, it does not make sense to say that there is no way for us to know what people mean by the utterance of the sentences of language. As we saw above, to mean is to mean something in particular (one thing rather than other one), then to know the meaning of a sentence is also to know something in particular (one thing rather than other one). Hence, to hold that we cannot get to know what we mean implies that it is possible for us to mean different things by our expressions, otherwise, if we could only mean one thing, the skeptical problem would not arise. However, as I said already, according to the grammar of our ordinary notion of "meaning" (the only one we have), to mean something by a sentence is to mean this rather than that, which rules out the possibility that we mean something different by the same sentence. Therefore, to say that we cannot get to know what we mean because we could be meaning different things does not make sense. Consequently, the question "how do we know which rules we acquiesce in?" turns out to be nonsensical too, since it is based on the possibility of our meaning different things by the same sentence.

applies to rabbits. But, then, one and the same disposition would be interpreted as manifesting incompatible rules.

However, if the disposition in question can be in accordance with incompatible rules, it does not accord or conflict with any rule whatsoever. The reason is that the ordinary and public notions of "accord" and "conflict" (the only ones we have) are conceptually mutually dependent([82]). That is, in order for an action to be in accord with a certain paradigm, it should be possible for another action to conflict with it, and vice versa. But, clearly, this condition is absent in the case of our disposition to assent to the question "Is there a rabbit in the garden?" whenever there are rabbits in the garden, given that the different interpretations of this disposition would never fail to accord with the rule for the use of "rabbit". In consequence, following Wittgenstein, it can be said that no interpretation can be made out to accord with the rule, because "there would be neither accord not conflict here"([83]). Therefore, the assumption that we interpret our verbal behaviour as following rules seems to involve the paradoxical consequence that no interpretation of such behaviour can be made out to accord with them([84]).

Accordingly, it can be said that our verbal behaviour simply follows or fails to follow certain rules (the ones we acquiesce in). But then, if my utterances follow certain rules, they cannot also follow other radically different ones. In other words, if my verbal behaviour manifests or is in accord with certain rules, then it cannot manifest (it conflicts with) other radically distinct rules. E.g. if

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[82]. These notions are like those of "good" and "bad", given that the notion of "good" is characterized, at least partially, as standing in opposition to that of "bad", and vice versa.

[83]. Wittgenstein, L *Philosophical...* Sec 201.

[84]. I have slightly modified the terms of the argument to apply it to the present case. However, the general structure remains the same. Cf *Ibid.*

my disposition to assent to the question "Is there a rabbit in the garden?" every time there is a rabbit in the garden shows that I use the term "rabbit" to refer to rabbits, then this same disposition cannot show that I use such term to refer to temporal segments of rabbits. If my utterances followed radically different rules, the linguistic rules we actually acquiesce in would lose the character of necessity that makes them function as paradigms against which we judge the mastery of language, that is, they would cease to govern the use of language. However, it is a grammatical truth that if our utterances are in accord with certain linguistic rules, they cannot also be in accord with other incompatible rules. So, it is nonsense to say that there is no fact of the matter about which rules our verbal behaviour follows. Furthermore, if our verbal behaviour were in accord with different rules, it seems that the existence of a common language would become a problem. It is hard to see how the fact that we use language in a certain way and not in an alternative one could be explained, given that, if our verbal behaviour is in accord with different rules, there is nothing in it to favor one rule over the others. And since according to linguistic behaviourism there is nothing more to meaning than our verbal dispositions, it seems that Quine is not justified in saying that we acquiesce in our mother tongue.

What are the consequences for linguistic behaviourism of the rejection of the indeterminacy thesis?. First, I am now in a position to restate what I said at the beginning of the section, namely, that linguistic behaviourism is a wrong-headed doctrine since the meaning of expressions is not the dispositions to assent and dissent from them under particular stimulatory circumstances, but the necessary a-posteriori linguistic rules that govern their use([85]). That is why it is misleading to say that there is nothing more

[85]. As I said above, Quine could only admit the existence of non-necessary linguistic rules.

to meaning than such dispositions. Linguistic rules are manifested in the everyday practice of language and our verbal behaviour is correct or incorrect depending on whether it accords or conflicts with such rules. Second, the notion of "stimulus meaning" is then inadequate to characterize meaning, and "our old notion of distinct and separate meanings", that Quine rejects on the false basis that it involves a reification of meanings and that is the only one we have, gets thus vindicated([86]).

Finally, it is clear that an adequate and satisfactory explanation of the notion of "meaning" (one that brings out the fact that it is the necessary a-posteriori linguistic rules that determine meaning) does not fall under one of the three types of explanations postulated by Quine: mental, behaviouristic and physiological. Our ordinary and public concept of "meaning" is not either mentalistic, behaviouristic or physiological. From the standpoint of Wittgenstein, these conceptions of meaning are the result of philosophical speculations. He agrees with Quine in that no inner mental fact can bear upon the question about the correctness of different translations of the sentences of language. However, the rejection of semantic mentalism does not imply acceptance of linguistic behaviourism *a la* Quine or of a sort of "linguistic physiologism".

[86]. On Quine's rejection of this notion cf. chapter 2, section I.

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