

Must We Mean What We Say?

That what we ordinarily say and mean may have a direct and deep control over what we can philosophically say and mean is an idea which many philosophers find oppressive. It might be argued that in part the oppression results from misunderstanding, that the new philosophy which proceeds from ordinary language is not *that* different from traditional methods of philosophizing, and that the frequent attacks upon it are misdirected. But I shall not attempt to be conciliatory, both because I think the new philosophy at Oxford is critically different from traditional philosophy, and because I think it is worth trying to bring out their differences as fully as possible. There is, after all, something oppressive about a philosophy which seems to have uncanny information about our most personal philosophical assumptions (those, for example, about whether we can ever know for certain of the existence of the external world, or of other minds; and those we make about favorite distinctions between "the descriptive and the normative," or between matters of fact and matters of language) and which inveterately nags us about them. Particularly oppressive when that philosophy seems so often *merely* to nag and to

Since writing the relevant portions of this paper, I have seen three articles which make points or employ arguments similar to those I am concerned with: R. M. Hare, "Are Discoveries About the Uses of Words Empirical?" *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. LIV (1957); G. E. M. Anscombe, "On Brute Facts," *Analysis*, Vol. XVIII (1957-1958); S. Hampshire and H. L. A. Hart, "Decision, Intention and Certainty," *Mind*, Vol. LXVII (1958). But it would have lengthened an already lengthy paper to have tried to bring out more specifically than will be obvious to anyone reading them their relevance to what I have said.

try no special answers to the questions which possess us—unless it be to suggest that we sit quietly in a room. Eventually, I suppose, we will have to look at that sense of oppression itself: such feelings can come from a truth about ourselves which we are holding off.

My hopes here are modest. I shall want to say why, in my opinion, some of the arguments Professor Mates brings against the Oxford philosophers he mentions are on the whole irrelevant to their main concerns. And this will require me to say something about what I take to be the significance of proceeding, in one's philosophizing, from what we ordinarily say and mean. That will not be an easy thing to do without appearing alternately trivial and dogmatic. Perhaps that is only to be expected, given the depth and the intimacy of conflict between this way of proceeding in philosophy and the way I take Mates to be following. These ways of philosophy seem, like friends who have quarreled, to be able neither to tolerate nor to ignore one another. I shall frequently be saying something one could not fail to know; and that will appear trivial. I shall also be suggesting that something we know is being overemphasized and something else not taken seriously enough; and that will appear dogmatic. But since I am committed to this dialogue, the time is past for worrying about appearances.



Professor Mates is less concerned to dispute specific results of the Oxford philosophers than he is to question the procedures which have led these philosophers to claim them. In particular, he doubts that they have assembled the sort of evidence which their "statements about ordinary language" require. As a basis for his skepticism, Mates produces a disagreement between two major figures of the school over the interpretation of an expression of ordinary language—a disagreement which he regards as symptomatic of the shallowness of their methods.¹ On Mates' account of it, the conflict is not likely to be settled successfully by further discussion. We are faced with two professors (of philosophy, it happens) each arguing (claiming, rather) that

¹ I am too conscious of differences in the practices of Oxford philosophers to be happy about referring, in this general way, to a school. But nothing in my remarks depends on the existence of such a school—beyond the fact that certain problems are common to the philosophers mentioned, and that similar questions enter into their attempts to deal with them. It is with these questions (I mean, of course, with what I understand them to be) that I am concerned.

the way he talks is the right way and that what he intuitively about language is the truth about it. But if this is what their claims amount to, it hardly seems worth a philosopher's time to try to collect evidence for them.

To evaluate the disagreement between Austin and Ryle, we may distinguish among the statements they make about ordinary language, three types:² (1) There are statements which produce *instances* of what is said in a language ("We do say . . . but we don't say—"; "We ask whether . . . but we do not ask whether—"). (2) Sometimes these instances are accompanied by *explications*—statements which make explicit what is implied when we say what statements of the first type instance us as saying ("When we say . . . we imply (suggest, say)—"; "We don't say . . . unless we mean—"). Such statements are checked by reference to statements of the first type. (3) Finally, there are *generalizations*, to be tested by reference to statements of the first two types. Since there is no special problem here about the testing of generalizations, we will be concerned primarily with the justification of statements of the first two types, and especially with the second.

Even without attempting to be more precise about these differences, the nature of the clash between Ryle and Austin becomes somewhat clearer. Notice, first of all, that the statement Mates quotes from Austin is of the first type: "Take 'voluntarily' . . . : we may . . . make a gift voluntarily . . ."—which I take to be material mode for, "We say, 'The gift was made voluntarily.'" (The significance of this shift of "mode" will be discussed.) Only one of the many statements Mates quotes from Ryle is of this type, viz., "It makes sense . . . to ask whether a boy was responsible for breaking a window, but not whether he was responsible for finishing his homework in good time. . . ." The statements of Ryle's which clash with Austin's are different: "In their most ordinary employment 'voluntary' and 'involuntary' are used . . . as adjectives applying to actions which ought not to be done. We discuss whether someone's action was voluntary or not only when the action seems to have been his fault . . . etc." These do not produce *instances* of what we say (the way "We say 'The boy was responsible for breaking the window'" does); they are

² Perhaps I should say "ideal" types. The statements do not come labeled in the discourse of such philosophers, but I am going to have to trust that my placing of statements into these types will not seem to distort them.

generalizations—as the phrases “actions which” and “only when” show—to be tested by producing such instances.

It is true that the instance quoted from Austin does go counter to Ryle's generalization: making a gift is not always something which ought not to be done, or something which is always someone's fault. There is clearly a clash here. But is our only intelligent course *at this point* to take a poll? Would it be dogmatic or unempirical of us to conclude simply that Ryle is wrong about this, that he has settled upon a generalization to which an obvious counterinstance has been produced? It is, moreover, an instance which Ryle himself may well be expected to acknowledge as counter to his generalization; indeed, one which he might have produced for himself. The fact that he did not need indicate only that he was too quick to accept a generalization, not that he is without (good) evidence for it. One of Mates' objections to Ryle can be put this way: Ryle is without evidence—anyway, without very good evidence—because he is not entitled to a statement of the first type (one which presents an *instance* of what we say) in the absence of experimental studies which demonstrate its occurrence in the language.

To see that this objection, taken in the general sense in which Mates urges it, is groundless, we must bear in mind the fact that these statements—statements that something is said in English—are being made by native speakers of English. Such speakers do not, in *general*, need evidence for what is said in the language; they are the source of such evidence. It is from them that the descriptive linguist takes the corpus of utterances on the basis of which he will construct a grammar of that language. To answer *some* kinds of specific questions, we will have to engage in that “laborious questioning” Mates insists upon, and count noses; but in general, to tell what is and isn't English, and to tell whether what is said is properly used, the native speaker can rely on his own nose; if not, there would be nothing to count. No one speaker will say everything, so it may be profitable to seek out others; and sometimes you (as a native speaker) may be unsure that a form of utterance is as you say it is, or is used as you say it is used, and in that case you will have to check with another native speaker. And because attending so hard to what you say may itself make you unsure more often than is normal, it is a good policy to check more often. A good policy, but not a methodological necessity. The philosopher who proceeds from ordinary language, in his use

of himself as subject in his collection of data, may be more informal than the descriptive linguist (though not more than the linguistic theorist using examples from his native speech); but there is nothing in that to make the data, in some general way, suspect.

Nor does this imply a reliance on that "intuition or memory" which Mates (p. 68)³ finds so objectionable. In claiming to know, in general, whether we do or do not use a given expression, I am not claiming to have an infallible memory for what we say, any more than I am claiming to remember the hour when I tell you what time we have dinner on Sundays. A normal person may forget and remember certain words, or what certain words mean, in his native language, but (assuming that he has used it continuously) he does not remember the *language*. There is a world of difference between a person who speaks a language natively and one who knows the language fairly well. If I lived in Munich and knew German fairly well, I might try to intuit or guess what the German expression for a particular phenomenon is. Or I might ask my landlady; and that would probably be the extent of the laborious questioning the problem demanded. Nor does the making of either of the sorts of statement about ordinary language I have distinguished rely on a claim that "[we have] already amassed . . . a tremendous amount of empirical information about the use of [our] native language" (Mates, *ibid.*). That would be true if we were, say, making statements about the history of the language, or about its sound system, or about the housewife's understanding of political slogans, or about a special form in the morphology of some dialect. But for a native speaker to say what, in ordinary circumstances, is said when, no such special information is needed or claimed. All that is needed is the truth of the proposition that a natural language is what native speakers of that language speak.



Ryle's generalization, however, requires more than simple, first level statements of instances; it also requires statements of the second type, those which contain first level statements together with an "explication" of them. When Ryle claims that ". . . we raise questions

³ Page references to Mates' paper, "On the Verification of Statements About Ordinary Language," throughout this essay are according to its occurrence in the collection entitled *Ordinary Language*, V. C. Chappell, ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964).

of responsibility only when someone is charged, justly or unjustly, with an offence," he is claiming both, "We say 'The boy was responsible for breaking a window,' but we do not say 'The boy was responsible for finishing his homework in good time,' " and also claiming, "When we say 'The boy was responsible for (some action)' we imply that the action was an offence, one that ought not to have been done, one that was his fault." I want to argue that Ryle is, in general, as entitled to statements of this second type as he is to statements of the first type; although it is just here that the particular generalization in question misses. We know Austin's example counters Ryle's claims because we know that the statement (of the second type), "When we say, 'The gift was made voluntarily' we imply that the action of making the gift was one which ought not to be done, or was someone's fault" is false. This is clearly knowledge which Mates was relying on when he produced the clash between them. I will take up statements of the second type in a moment.

Before proceeding to that, let us look at that clash a bit longer: its importance has altered considerably. What Austin says does not go fully counter to Ryle's story. It is fundamental to Austin's account to emphasize that we cannot *always* say of actions that they were voluntary, even when they obviously were not involuntary either. Although we can (sometimes) say, "The gift was made voluntarily," it is specifically not something we can say about ordinary, unremarkable cases of making gifts. Only when the action (or circumstances) of making the gift is in some way unusual (instead of his usual Christmas bottle, you give the neighborhood policeman a check for \$1000), or extraordinary (you leave your heirs penniless and bequeath your house to your cat), or untoward (you give your rocking horse to your new friend, but the next morning you cry to have it back), can the question whether it was voluntary intelligibly arise. Ryle has not completely neglected this: his "actions which ought not to be done" and his "action [which] seems to have been . . . [someone's] fault" are clearly examples of actions which are abnormal, untoward, questionable; so he is right in saying that about these we (sometimes) raise the question whether they were voluntary. His error lies in characterizing these actions incompletely, and in wrongly characterizing those about which the question *cannot* arise. Normally, it is true, the question whether satisfactory, correct, or admirable performances are volun-

tary does not arise; but this is because there is usually nothing about such actions to question; nothing has gone wrong.

Not seeing that the condition for applying the term "voluntary" holds quite generally—viz., the condition that there be something (real or imagined) fishy about any performance intelligibly so characterized—Ryle construes the condition too narrowly, supposes that there must be something *morally* fishy about the performance. He had indeed sensed trouble where trouble was: the philosophical use of "voluntary" stretches the idea of volition out of shape, beyond recognition. And his diagnosis of the trouble was sound: philosophers imagine, because of a distorted picture of the mind, that the term "voluntary" must apply to all actions which are not involuntary (or unintentional), whereas it is only applicable where there is some specific reason to raise the question. The fact that Ryle fails to specify its applicability precisely enough no more vitiates his entire enterprise than does the fact that he indulges a mild form of the same vice he describes: he frees himself of the philosophical tic of stretching what is true of definite segments of what we do to cover *everything* we do (as epistemologists stretch doubt to cover everything we say), but not from the habit of identifying linguistic antitheses with logical contradictories:⁴ in particular, he takes the question, "Voluntary or not?" to mean, "Voluntary or involuntary?" and seems to suppose that (responsible) actions which are not contemptible must be admirable, and that whatever I (responsibly) do either is my fault or else is to my credit. These antitheses miss exactly those actions about which the question "Voluntary or not?" really has no sense, viz., those ordinary, unremarkable, natural things we do which make up most of our conduct and which are neither admirable nor contemptible; which, indeed, could only erroneously be said to go on, in general, in any special way.⁵ Lacking sureness here, it is not surprising that

⁴ The harmfulness of this habit is brought out in Austin's "A Plea for Excuses," reprinted in his *Philosophical Papers*, J. O. Urmson and G. J. Warnock, eds. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1961). Pages 130ff. of his paper contain an elaborate defense of (anyway Austin's version of) "ordinary language philosophy." No one concerned with the general subject of the present symposium (or, in particular, with the possibility of budging the subject of moral philosophy) should (= will) neglect its study.

⁵ Austin's discovery (for our time and place, anyway) of normal action is, I think, important enough to bear the philosophical weight he puts upon it—holding the clue to the riddle of Freedom. (See Chappell, *op. cit.*, p. 45.) A case can also be made out that it was failure to recognize such action which produced some of the notorious

Ryle's treatment leaves the subject a bit wobbly. Feeling how *enormously* wrong it is to remove "voluntary" from a *specific* function, he fails to sense the slighter error of his own specification.⁶

I have said that the ordinary language philosopher is also and equally entitled to statements of the second type I distinguished, which means that he is entitled not merely to say what (words) we say, but equally to say what we should mean in (by) saying them. Let us turn to statements of this type and ask what the relation is between what you explicitly say and what you imply; or, to avoid begging the question, ask how we are to account for the fact (supposing it to be a fact) that we only say or ask A ("X is voluntary," or "Is X voluntary?") where B is the case (something is, or seems, fishy about X).⁷ The philosophical problem about this arises in the following way: Philosophers who proceed from ordinary language are likely to insist that if you say A where B is not the case, you will be misusing A, or distorting its meaning. But another philosopher will not want to allow that, because it makes the relation between A and B appear to be a logical one (If A then B; and if not-B then not-A); whereas logical relations hold only between statements, not between a statement and the world: *that* relation is "merely" conventional (or, even, causal?). So the occasion on which we (happen to?) *use* a statement cannot be considered part of its meaning or logic. The solution is then to call the latter the semantics of the expression and the former its pragmatics.

But if we can forget for a moment that the relation between A

paradoxes of classical Utilitarianism: what neither the Utilitarians nor their critics seem to have seen clearly and constantly is that about unquestionable (normal, natural) action no question is (can be) raised; in particular not the question whether the action ought or ought not to have been done. The point is a logical one: to raise a question about an action is to put the action in question. It is partly the failure to appreciate this which makes the classical moralists (appear?) so moralistic, allows them to suppose that the moral question is *always* appropriate—except, of course, where the action is unfree (caused?). But this is no better than the assumption that the moral question is *never* appropriate (because we are never *really* free). Such mechanical moralism has got all the punishment it deserves in the recent mechanical antimoralism, which it must have helped inspire.

* At the same time, Ryle leaves "involuntary" as stretched as ever when he allows himself to speak of "the involuntariness of [someone's] late arrival," *The Concept of Mind* (London: Hutchinson and Co., Ltd., 1949), p. 72.

⁷ I realize that the point is controversial and that in putting so much emphasis on it I may be doing some injustice to the point of view I am trying to defend. There may be considerations which would lead one to be more temperate in making the point; but against the point of view Mates is adopting, it seems to me to demand all the attention it can get.

and B *cannot* be a logical one, we may come to feel how implausible it is to say that it is not logical; or rather, to say that nothing *follows* about B from the utterance of A. It is implausible because we do not accept a question like "Did you do that voluntarily?" as appropriate about any and every action. If a person asks you whether you dress the way you do voluntarily, you will not understand him to be curious merely about your psychological processes (whether your wearing them "proceeds from free choice . . ."); you will understand him to be implying or suggesting that your manner of dress is in some way peculiar. If it be replied to this that "voluntary" does not *mean* "peculiar" (or "special" or "fishy") and hence that the implication or suggestion is part merely of the pragmatics of the expression, not part of its *meaning* (semantics), my rejoinder is this: that reply is relevant to a different claim from the one urged here; it is worth saying *here* only if you are able to account for the *relation* between the pragmatics and the semantics of the expression. In the absence of such an account, the reply is empty. For consider: If we use Mates' formula for computing the pragmatic value of an expression—"He wouldn't say that unless he . . ."—then in the described situation we will complete it with something like ". . . unless he thought that my way of dressing is peculiar." Call this implication of the utterance "pragmatic"; the fact remains that he wouldn't (couldn't) say what he did without implying what he did: he **MUST MEAN** that my clothes are peculiar. I am less interested now in the "mean" than I am in the "must." (After all, there is bound to be some reason why a number of philosophers are tempted to call a relation logical; "must" is logical.) But on this, the "pragmatic" formula throws no light whatever.

What this shows is that the formula does not help us account for the element of necessity ("must") in statements whose implication we understand. But it is equally unhelpful in trying to explain the implication of a statement whose use we do *not* understand (the context in which the formula enters Mates' discussion). Imagine that I am sitting in my countinghouse counting up my money. Someone who knows that I do that at this hour every day passes by and says, "You ought to do that." What should we say about his statement? That he does not know what "ought" means (what the dictionary says)? That he does not know how to use the word? That he does not know what obligation is? Applying the formula, we compute: "He wouldn't say

that unless he asks himself whenever he sees anyone doing anything, 'Ought that person to be doing that or ought he not?' " This may indeed account for his otherwise puzzling remark; but it does so by telling us something we did not know about *him*; it tells us nothing whatever we did not know about the words he used. Here it is *because* we know the meaning and use of "ought" that we are forced to account in the way Mates suggests for its extraordinary occurrence. I take Mates' formula, then, to be expandable into: "Since I understand the meaning and use of his expression, he wouldn't say that unless he . . ." . Perhaps Mates would consider this a distortion and take a different expansion to be appropriate: "He wouldn't say that unless he was using his words in a special way." But now "say that" has a very different force. The expanded form now means, "I know what his expression would ordinarily be used to say, but he can't wish to say that: I don't understand what he is saying." In neither of its expansions, then, does the formula throw any light on the way an expression is being used: in the one case we already know, in the other we have yet to learn. (Another expansion may be: "He wouldn't say that unless he was using X to mean Y." But here again, it is the semantics and pragmatics of Y which are relevant to understanding what is said, and the formula presupposes that we already understand Y.)

Our alternatives seem to be these: Either (1) we deny that there is any rational (logical, grammatical) constraint over the "pragmatic implications" of what we say—or perhaps deny that there *are* any *implications*, on the ground that the relation in question is not deductive—so that unless what I say is flatly false or unless I explicitly contradict myself, it is pointless to suggest that what I say is wrong or that I must mean something other than I say; or else (2) we admit the constraint and say either (a) since all necessity is logical, the "pragmatic implications" of our utterance are (quasi-)logical implications; with or without adding (b) since the "pragmatic implications" cannot be construed in terms of deductive (or inductive) logic, there must be some "third sort" of logic; or we say (c) some necessity is not logical. None of these alternatives is without its obscurities, but they are clear enough for us to see that Mates is taking alternative (1),⁸

⁸ As is most clearly shown where he says (p. 72) ". . . When I say 'I may be wrong' I do not *imply* that I have no confidence in what I have previously asserted; I only indicate it." Why "only"? Were he willing to say ". . . but I do (inevitably) indicate it," there may be no argument.

whereas the philosopher who proceeds from ordinary language is likely to feel the need of some form of (2). Alternative (2a) brings out part of the reason behind the Oxford philosopher's insistence that he is talking logic, while (2b) makes explicit the reason other philosophers are perplexed at that claim.⁹

The difference between alternatives (1) and (2) is fundamental; so fundamental, that it is very difficult to argue. When Mates says, "Perhaps it is true that ordinarily I wouldn't say 'I know it' unless I felt great confidence in what I was asserting . . .," what he says is not, if you like, *strictly* wrong; but it is wrong—or, what it implies is wrong. It implies that whether I confine the formula "I know . . ." to statements about which I feel great confidence is *up to me* (*rightly* up to me); so that if I say "I know . . ." in the absence of confidence, I have not misused language, and in particular I have not stretched the *meaning* of the word "know." And yet, if a child were to say "I know . . ." when you know the child does not *know* (is in no position to say he knows) you may reply, "You don't really mean (N.B.) you *know*, you only mean you believe"; or you may say, "You oughtn't to say you *know* when you only *think* so."

There are occasions on which it would be useful to have the "semantic-pragmatic" distinction at hand. If, for example, a philosopher tells me that the statement, "You ought to do so-and-so" expresses private emotion and is hortatory and hence not, strictly speaking, meaningful, then it may be worth replying that nothing follows about the meaning (semantics) of a statement from the way it is used (pragmatics); and this reply may spare our having to make up special brands of meaning. But the time for that argument is, presumably, *past*.¹⁰ What needs to be argued now is that something *does* follow from the fact that a term is used in its usual way: it entitles you (or, using the term, you entitle others) to make certain inferences, draw certain conclusions. (This is part of what you say when you say that you are talking about the *logic* of ordinary language.) *Learning what these implications are is part of learning the language; no less a part*

⁹ Alternative (2b) has been taken—for different, but not unrelated, reasons—in the writings of John Wisdom, e.g., "Gods," in *Logic and Language*, 1st series, Antony Flew, ed. Oxford: Basil Blackwell & Mott, Ltd., 1951), p. 196; in S. Toulmin, *The Place of Reason in Ethics* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1950), p. 83; and in S. Hampshire, "Fallacies in Moral Philosophy," *Mind*, Vol. LVIII (1949), 470f.

¹⁰ It was essentially the argument with which the pragmatists attempted to subdue emotive "meaning." See John Dewey, "Ethical Subject-Matter and Language," *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. XLII (1945), 701ff.

than learning its syntax, or learning what it is to which terms apply: they are an essential part of what we communicate when we talk. Intimate understanding is understanding which is implicit. Nor *could* everything we say (mean to communicate), in normal communication, be said explicitly¹¹—otherwise the only threat to communication would be acoustical. We are, therefore, exactly as responsible for the specific implications of our utterances as we are for their explicit factual claims. And there can no more be some general procedure for securing that what one implies is appropriate than there can be for determining that what one says is true. Misnaming and misdescribing are not the only mistakes we can make in talking. Nor is lying its only immorality.



I am prepared to conclude that the philosopher who proceeds from ordinary language is entitled, without special empirical investigation, to assertions of the second sort we distinguished, viz., assertions like, "We do not say 'I know . . . ' unless we mean that we have great confidence . . . ," and like "When we ask whether an action is voluntary we imply that the action is fishy" (call this S). But I do not think that I have *shown* that he is entitled to them, because I have not shown what kind of assertions they are; I have not shown when such assertions should be said, and by whom, and what should be meant in saying them. It is worth trying to indicate certain complexities of the assertions, because they are easy to over-

¹¹ I think of this as a law of communication; but it would be important and instructive to look for apparent counterinstances. When *couldn't* what is said be misunderstood? My suggestion is, only when nothing is implied, i.e., when everything you say is said explicitly. (Should we add: or when all of the implications of what is asserted can be made explicit in a certain way, e.g., by the methods of formal logic? It may be along such lines that utterances in logical form come to seem the ideal of understandable utterances, that here you can communicate *only* what you say, or else *more* than you say without endangering understanding. But we might think of formal logic not as the guarantor of understanding but as a substitute for it. Cf. W. V. O. Quine, "Mr. Strawson on Logical Theory," *Mind*, Vol. LXII (1953), 444f. Then we can express this "law of communication" this way: What needs understanding can be misunderstood.) But when is everything said explicitly? When the statement is about sense-data rather than "physical" objects? When it is about the (physical) movements I make rather than the (nonphysical?) actions I perform? Perhaps the opponents of the Quest for Certainty (whose passion seems to have atrophied into a fear of the word "certain") have embarked upon a Quest for Explicitness. Strawson's notion of *pre-supposing* is relevant here, since explicitness and presupposition vary inversely. See "On Referring," *Mind*, Vol. LIX (1950); reprinted in *Essays in Conceptual Analysis*, Antony Flew, ed. (London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1956).

look. Something important will be learned if we realize that we do *not* know what kind of assertion S is.

When (if) you feel that S is necessarily true, that it is a priori, you will have to explain how a statement which is obviously not analytic *can* be true a priori. That S is not analytic is what (is all that) is shown by Mates' arguments about the "semantic-pragmatic" confusion; it is perfectly true that "voluntary" does not *mean* (you will not find set beside it in a dictionary) "fishy." When I am impressed with the necessity of statements like S, I am tempted to say that they are categorial—about the concept of an action *überhaupt*. (A normal action is neither voluntary nor involuntary, neither careful nor careless, neither expected nor unexpected, neither right nor wrong. . . .) This would account for our feeling of their necessity: they are instances (not of Formal, but) of Transcendental Logic. But this is really no explanation until we make clearer the need for the concept of an action in general.

However difficult it is to make out a case for the necessity of S, it is important that the temptation to call it a priori not be ignored; otherwise we will acquiesce in calling it synthetic, which would be badly misleading. Misleading (wrong) because we know what would count as a disproof of statements which are synthetic (to indicate the willingness to entertain such disproof is the point of calling a statement synthetic), but it is not clear what would count as a disproof of S. The feeling that S must be synthetic comes, of course, partly from the fact that it obviously is not (likely to be taken as) analytic. But it comes also from the ease with which S may be mistaken for the statement, " 'Is X voluntary?' implies that X is fishy" (T), which does seem obviously synthetic. But S and T, though they are true together and false together, are not everywhere interchangeable; the identical state of affairs is described by both, but a person who may be entitled to say T, may not be entitled to say S. Only a native speaker of English is entitled to the statement S, whereas a linguist describing English may, though he is not a native speaker of English, be entitled to T. What entitles him to T is his having gathered a certain amount and kind of evidence in its favor. But the person entitled to S is not entitled to *that* statement for the same reason. He *needs* no evidence for it. It would be misleading to say that he *has* evidence for S, for that would suggest that he has done the sort of investigation the linguist has done, only less systematically, and this

would make it seem that his claim to know S is very weakly based. And it would be equally misleading to say that he does *not* have evidence for S, because that would make it appear that there is something he still needs, and suggests that he is not yet entitled to S. But there is nothing he needs, and there is no evidence (which it makes sense, in *general*, to say) he has: the question of evidence is irrelevant.

An examination of what does entitle a person to the statement S would be required in any full account of such statements. Such an examination is out of the question here. But since I will want to claim that Mates' "two methods" for gathering evidence in support of "statements about ordinary language" like S are irrelevant to what entitles a person to S, and since this obviously rests on the claim that the concept of evidence is, in general, irrelevant to them altogether, let me say just this: The clue to understanding the sort of statement S is lies in appreciating the fact that "we," while plural, is first person. First person *singular* forms have recently come in for a great deal of attention, and they have been shown to have very significant logical-epistemological properties. The plural form has similar, and equally significant, properties; but it has been, so far as I know, neglected. The claim that in general we do not require evidence for statements in the first person plural does not rest upon a claim that we cannot be wrong about what we are doing or about what we say, but only that it would be extraordinary if we were (often). My point about such statements, then, is that they are sensibly questioned only where there is some special reason for supposing what I say about what I (we) say to be wrong; only here is the request for evidence competent. If I am wrong about what he does (they do), that may be no great surprise; but if I am wrong about what I (we) do, that is liable, where it is not comic, to be tragic.

Statements like T have their own complexities, and it would be unwise even of them to say simply that they are synthetic. Let us take another of Mates' examples: "'I know it' is not (ordinarily) said unless the speaker has great confidence in it" (T'). Mates takes this as patently synthetic, a statement about matters of fact (and there is no necessary connection among matters of fact). And so it might be, said by a Scandinavian linguist as part of his description of English. But if that linguist, or if a native speaker (i.e., a speaker entitled to say, "We do not say 'I know it' unless . . .") uses T' in teaching someone to speak English, or to remind a native speaker of something

he knows but is not bearing in mind, T' sounds less like a descriptive statement than like a rule.

Because of what seems to be the widespread idea that rules always sort with commands and must therefore be represented as imperatives, this complementarity of rule and statement may come as something of a shock. But that such complementarity exists can be seen in writings which set out the rules for games or ceremonies or languages. In *Hoyle's Rules of Games* we find statements like, "The opponent at declarer's left makes the opening lead . . . Declarer's partner then lays his whole hand face up on the table, with his trumps if any on the right. The hand so exposed is the *dummy*. . . . The object of play is solely to win tricks, in order to fulfill or defeat the contract"; in *Robert's Rules of Order*, the rules take the form, "The privileged motion to adjourn takes precedence of all others, except the privileged motion 'to fix the time to which to adjourn,' to which it yields" (in Section 17, headed "To Adjourn"); taking a grammar at random we find, "Mute stems form the nominative singular by the addition of -s in the case of masculines and feminines. . . . Before -s of the nominative singular, a labial mute (p, b) remains unchanged." These are all statements in the indicative, not the imperative, mood. (Some expressions in each of these books tell us what we *must* do; others that we *may*. I will suggest later a reason for this shift.) In one light, they appear to be descriptions; in another to be rules. Why should this be so? What is its significance?

The explanation of the complementarity has to do with the fact that its topic is actions. When we say how an action is done (how to act) what we say may report or describe the way we *in fact* do it (if we are entitled to say how "we" do it, i.e., to say what we do, or say what we say) but it may also lay out a way of doing or saying something which is to be *followed*. Whether remarks like T'—remarks "about" ordinary language, and equally about ordinary actions—are statements or rules depends upon how they are taken: if they are taken to state facts and are supposed to be believed, they are statements; if they are taken as guides and supposed to be followed, they are rules. Such expressions are no more "in themselves" rules or (synthetic) statements than other expressions are, in themselves, postulates or conclusions or definitions or replies. We might put the relation between the two contexts of T' this way: Statements which describe a language (or a game or an institution) are rules (are binding) if

you want to speak that language (play that game, accept that institution); or, rather, *when* you are speaking that language, playing that game, etc. If it is TRUE to say "*I know it*" is not used unless you have great confidence in it," then, when you are speaking English, it is WRONG (a misuse) to say "*I know it*" unless you have great confidence in it. Now the philosopher who proceeds from ordinary language assumes that he and his interlocutors are speaking from within the language, so that the question of whether you want to speak that language is pointless. Worse than pointless, because strictly the ordinary language philosopher does not, in general, *assume* that he and his interlocutors are speaking from within a given (their native) language—any more than they speak their native language, in general, *intentionally*. The only condition relevant to such philosophizing is that you speak (not this or that language, but) period.

At this point the argument has become aporetic. "Statements about ordinary language" like S, T and T' are not analytic, *and* they are not (it would be misleading to call them) synthetic (just like that).¹² Nor do we know whether to say they are a priori, or whether to account for their air of necessity as a dialectical illusion, due more to the motion of our argument than to their own nature. Given our current alternatives, there is no way to classify such statements; we do not yet know what they are.



Before searching for new ways into these problems, I should perhaps justify my very heavy reliance on the idea of *context*, because

¹² If it still seems that statements like S and T *must* be synthetic, perhaps it will help to realize that anyway they are not *just some more* synthetic statements about voluntary action, on a par with a statement to the effect that somebody does (indeed) dress the way he does voluntarily. It may be true that if the world were different *enough*, the statements would be false; but that amounts to saying that if "voluntary" meant something other than it does, the statements would not mean what they do—which is not surprising. The statements in question are more closely related to such a statement as "The future will resemble the past": this is not a (not just another) prediction, on a par with statements about whether it will rain. Russell's chicken (who was fed every day throughout its life but ultimately had its neck wrung) was so well fed that he neglected to consider what was happening to other chickens. Even if he had considered this, he would doubtless still have had his neck wrung; but at least he wouldn't have been outsmarted. He could have avoided *that* indignity because he was wrong only about one thing; as Russell very properly says, ". . . in spite of frequent repetitions there sometimes is a failure at the last," *The Problems of Philosophy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1912), p. 102. But if the future were not (in the *general* sense needed) "like" the past, this would not be a failure. The future may wring our minds, but by that very act it would have given up trying to outsmart us.

on Mates' description of what a statement of context involves, it should be impossible ever to make one. Let me recall his remarks: "We have all heard the wearying platitude that 'you can't separate' the meaning of a word from the entire context in which it occurs, including not only the actual linguistic context, but also the aims, feelings, beliefs, and hopes of the speaker, the same for the listener and any bystanders, the social situation, the physical surroundings, the historical background, the rules of the game, and so on ad infinitum" (p. 71). Isn't this another of those apostrophes to the infinite which prevents philosophers from getting down to cases?¹³ Of course if I have to go on about the context of "voluntary" ad infinitum, I would not get very far with it. But I would claim to have characterized the context sufficiently (for the purpose at hand) by the statement that something is, or is supposed to be, fishy about the action. Giving directions for using a word is no more prodigious and unending a task than giving directions for anything else. The context in which I make a martini with vodka is no less complex than the context in which I make a statement with "voluntary." Say, if you like, that these actions take place in infinitely complex contexts; but then remember that you can be given directions for doing either. It may be wearying always to be asked for a story within which a puzzling remark can seriously be imagined to function; but I know no better way of maintaining that relevance, or sense of reality, which each philosopher claims for himself and claims to find lacking in another philosophy. At least it would spare us the surrealism of worries like "'What time is it?' asserts nothing, and hence is neither true nor false; yet we all know what it means *well enough* to answer it";¹⁴ or like "If we told a person to close the door, and received the reply, 'Prove it!' should we not, to speak mildly, grow somewhat impatient?"¹⁵

In recommending that we ignore context in order to make "provisional divisions" of a subject and get an investigation started, Mates is recommending the wrong thing for the right reason. It is

¹³ A complaint Austin voiced in the course of his William James Lectures, on Performatives, at Harvard in the Spring term of 1955; published as *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1962); also Galaxy Books edition (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1965).

¹⁴ John Hospers, *An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1953), p. 69. My emphasis.

¹⁵ Charles Stevenson, *Ethics and Language* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1944), p. 26.

true that we cannot say everything at once and that for some problems some distinction of the sort Mates has in mind may be of service. My discontent with it is that it has come to deflect investigation—I mean from questions on which Oxford philosophy trains itself. Where your concern is one of constructing artificial languages, you may explain that you mean to be considering only the syntax (and perhaps semantics) of a language, and not its pragmatics. Or where it becomes important to emphasize a distinction between (where there has come to be a distinction between) scientific and metaphysical assertion, or between factual report and moral rule, you may set out a “theory” of scientific or factual utterance. In these cases you will be restricting concern in order to deal with certain properties of formal systems, certain problems of meaning, and to defeat certain forms of nonsense. Flat contradiction, metaphysical assertion masquerading as scientific hypothesis, mere whim under the posture of an ethical or aesthetic (or psychological or legal) judgment—these perhaps need hounding out. But the philosopher who proceeds from ordinary language is concerned less to avenge sensational crimes against the intellect than to redress its civil wrongs; to steady any imbalance, the tiniest usurpation, in the mind. This inevitably requires reintroducing ideas which have become tyrannical (e.g., existence, obligation, certainty, identity, reality, truth . . .) into the specific contexts in which they function naturally. This is not a question of cutting big ideas down to size, but of giving them the exact space in which they can move without corrupting. Nor does our wish to rehabilitate rather than to deny or expel such ideas (by such sentences as, “We can never know for certain . . .”; “The table is not real (really solid)”; “To tell me what I ought to do is always to tell me what you want me to do . . .”) come from a sentimental altruism. It is a question of self-preservation: for who is it that the philosopher punishes when it is the mind itself which assaults the mind?



I want now to turn to two other, related, questions on which Mates finds himself at issue with the Oxford philosophers. The first concerns their tendency to introduce statements of the first sort I distinguished not with “We do say . . .” but with “We *can* say . . .” and “We *can’t* say . . .”. The second question concerns, at last

directly, reasons for saying that we "must" mean by our words what those words *ordinarily* mean.

Let me begin by fulfilling my promise to expand upon my remark that Austin's saying, "We may make a gift voluntarily" is "material mode" for "We can say, 'The gift was made voluntarily.'" The shift from talking about language to talking about the world occurs almost imperceptibly in the statement of Austin's which Mates quotes—almost as though he thought it did not much matter *which* he talked about. Let me recall the passage from Austin: ". . . take 'voluntarily' and 'involuntarily': we may join the army or make a gift voluntarily, we may hiccup or make a small gesture involuntarily." He begins here by mentioning a pair of words, and goes on to tell us what we may in fact do. With what right? Why is it assumed that we find out what voluntary and involuntary actions *are* (and equally, of course, what inadvertent and automatic and pious, etc., actions are) by asking when we should *say* of an action that it is voluntary or inadvertent or pious, etc.?

But what is troubling about this? If you feel that finding out what something is must entail investigation of the world rather than of language, perhaps you are imagining a situation like finding out what somebody's name and address are, or what the contents of a will or a bottle are, or whether frogs eat butterflies. But now imagine that you are in your armchair reading a book of reminiscences and come across the word "umiak." You reach for your dictionary and look it up. Now what did you do? Find out what "umiak" means, or find out what an umiak is? But how could we have discovered something about the world by hunting in the dictionary? If this seems surprising, perhaps it is because we forget that we learn language and learn the world *together*, that they become elaborated and distorted together, and in the same places. We may also be forgetting how elaborate a process the learning is. We tend to take what a native speaker does when he looks up a noun in a dictionary as the characteristic process of learning language. (As, in what has become a less forgivable tendency, we take naming as the fundamental source of meaning.) But it is merely the end point in the process of learning the word. When we turned to the dictionary for "umiak" we already knew everything about the word, as it were, but its combination: we knew what a noun is and how to name an object and how to look up a word and what boats are and what an Eskimo is. We were all

prepared for that umiak. What seemed like finding the world in a dictionary was really a case of bringing the world to the dictionary. We had the world with us all the time, in that armchair; but we felt the weight of it only when we felt a lack in it. Sometimes we will need to bring the dictionary to the world. That will happen when (say) we run across a small boat in Alaska of a sort we have never seen and wonder—what? What it is, or what it is called? In either case, the learning is a question of aligning language and the world.¹⁶ What you need to learn will depend on what specifically it is you want to know; and how you can find out will depend specifically on what you already command. How we answer the question, "What is X?" will depend, therefore, on the specific case of ignorance and of knowledge.

It sometimes happens that we know everything there is to know about a situation—what all of the words in question mean, what all of the relevant facts are; and everything is in front of our eyes. And yet we feel we don't know something, don't understand something. In this situation, the question "What is X?" is very puzzling, in exactly the way philosophy is very puzzling. We feel we want to ask the question, and yet we feel we already have the answer. (One might say we have all the *elements* of an answer.) Socrates says that in such a situation we need to remind ourselves of something. So does the philosopher who proceeds from ordinary language: we need to remind ourselves of *what we should say when*.¹⁷ But what is the point of reminding ourselves of that? When the philosopher asks, "What should we say here?", what is meant is, "What would be the normal thing to say here?", or perhaps, "What is the most natural thing we could say here?" And the point of the question is this: answering

¹⁶ For modern instruction in the complexities of this question, see Austin's and P. F. Strawson's contributions to the symposium, "Truth," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Suppl. Vol. XXIV (1950); D. F. Pears, "Universals" and "Incompatibilities of Colours," both in *Logic and Language*, 2nd series, Antony Flew, ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell & Mott, Ltd., 1953); W. V. O. Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," *Philosophical Review*, Vol. LX (1951); reprinted in *From a Logical Point of View* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1953); and John Wisdom, papers collected in *Philosophy and Psycho-Analysis* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell & Mott, Ltd., 1953), especially "Philosophical Perplexity," "Metaphysics and Verification," and "Philosophy, Metaphysics and Psycho-Analysis."

¹⁷ The emphasized formula is Austin's. Notice that the "should" cannot simply be replaced by "ought to," nor yet, I believe, simply replaced by "would." It will not, that is, yield its secrets to the question, "Descriptive or normative?" (See "A Plea for Excuses," *op. cit.*, p. 129.)

it is sometimes the only way to tell—tell others and tell for ourselves—what the situation is.

Sometimes the only way to tell. But when? The nature of the Oxford philosopher's question, and the nature of his conception of philosophy, can be brought out if we turn the question upon itself, and thus remind ourselves of when it is we need to remind ourselves of what we should say when. Our question then becomes: When should we ask ourselves when we should (and should not) say "The x is F " in order to find out what an $F(x)$ is? (For "The x is F " read "The action is voluntary (or pious)," or "The statement is vague (or false)," or "The question is misleading.") The answer suggested is: When you have to. When you have more facts than you know what to make of, or when you do not know what new facts would show. When, that is, you need a clear view of what you already know. When you need to do philosophy.¹⁸ Euthyphro does not need to learn any new facts, yet he needs to learn something: you can say either that in the *Euthyphro* Socrates was finding out what "piety" means or finding out what piety is.



When the philosopher who proceeds from ordinary language tells us, "You can't say such-and-such," what he means is that you cannot say that *here* and communicate *this* situation to others, or understand it for yourself.¹⁹ This is sometimes what he means by calling certain expressions "misuses" of language, and also makes clear the consequences of such expressions: they break our understanding. The normativeness which Mates felt, and which is certainly present, does not lie in the ordinary language philosopher's assertions *about* ordinary use; what is normative is exactly ordinary use itself.

The way philosophers have practiced with the word "normative"

¹⁸ This is part of the view of philosophy most consistently represented in and by the writings of John Wisdom. It derives from Wittgenstein.

¹⁹ Of course you can say (the words), "When I ask whether an action is voluntary I do not imply that I think something is special about the action." You can say this, but then you may have difficulty showing the relevance of *this* "voluntary" to what people are worrying about when they ask whether a person's action was voluntary or whether our actions are ever voluntary. We might regard the Oxford philosopher's insistence upon ordinary language as an attempt to overcome (what has become) the self-imposed irrelevance of so much philosophy. In this they are continuing—while at the same time their results are undermining—the tradition of British Empiricism: being gifted pupils, they seem to accept and to assassinate with the same gesture.

in recent years seems to me lamentable. But it is too late to avoid the word, so even though we cannot now embark on a diagnosis of the ills which caused its current use, or those which it has produced, it may be worth forewarning ourselves against the confusions most likely to distract us. The main confusions about the problem of "normativeness" I want to mention here are these: the idea (1) that descriptive utterances are opposed to normative utterances; and (2) that prescriptive utterances are (typical) instances of normative utterances.

We have touched upon these ideas in talking about rule-statement complementarity; here we touch them at a different point. In saying here that it is a confusion to speak of some general opposition between descriptive and normative utterances, I am not thinking primarily of the plain fact that rules have counterpart (descriptive) statements, but rather of the significance of that fact, viz., that what such statements describe are *actions* (and not, e.g., the *movements* of bodies, animate or inanimate). The most characteristic fact about actions is that they can—in various specific ways—go wrong, that they can be performed incorrectly. This is not, in any restricted sense, a moral assertion, though it points the moral of intelligent activity. And it is as true of describing as it is of calculating or of promising or plotting or warning or asserting or defining. . . . These are actions which we perform, and our successful performance of them depends upon our adopting and following the ways in which the action in question is done, upon what is normative for it. Descriptive statements, then, are not opposed to ones which are normative, but in fact presuppose them: we could not do the thing we call describing if language did not provide (we had not been taught) ways normative for describing.

The other point I wish to emphasize is this: if a normative utterance is one used to create or institute rules or standards, then prescriptive utterances are not examples of normative utterances. Establishing a norm is not telling us how we *ought* to perform an action, but telling us how the action *is* done, or how it is *to be* done.²⁰ Contrariwise, telling us what we ought to do is not instituting a norm

²⁰ This latter distinction appears in two senses of the expression "establishing a rule or standard." In one it means finding what is in fact standard in certain instances. In the other it means founding what is to be standard for certain instances. "Settle" and "determine" have senses comparable to those of "establish."

to cover the case, but rather presupposes the existence of such a norm, i.e., presupposes that there is something to do which it would be correct to do here. Telling us what we ought to do may involve *appeal* to a pre-existent rule or standard, but it cannot constitute the establishment of that rule or standard. We may expect the retort here that it is just the *appeal* which is the sensitive normative spot, for what we are really doing when we appeal to a rule or standard is telling somebody that they ought to adhere to it. Perhaps this will be followed by the query "And suppose they don't accept the rule or standard to which you appeal, what then?" The retort is simply false. And to the query one may reply that this will not be the first time we have been tactless; nor can we, to avoid overstepping the bounds of relationship, follow every statement by ". . . if you accept the facts and the logic I do," nor every evaluation by ". . . if you accept the standards I do." Such cautions will finally suggest appending to everything we say ". . . if you mean by your words what I mean by mine." Here the pantomime of caution concludes. It is true that we sometimes appeal to standards which our interlocutor does not accept; but this does not in the least show that what we are there really doing is attempting to institute a standard (of our own). Nor does it in the least show that we are (merely) expressing our own opinion or feeling on the matter. We of course *may* express our private opinion or feeling—we normally do so where it is not clear what (or that any) rule or standard fits the case at hand and where we are therefore not willing or able to appeal to any.

The practice of appealing to a norm can be abused, as can any other of our practices. Sometimes people appeal to a rule when we deserve more intimate attention from them. Just as sometimes people tell us what we ought to do when all they mean is that they want us to. But this is as much an abuse where the context is moral as it is where the context is musical ("You ought to accent the *appoggia-tura*"), or scientific ("You ought to use a control group here"), or athletic ("You ought to save your wind on the first two laps"). Private persuasion (or personal appeal) is not the paradigm of ethical utterance, but represents the breakdown (or the transcending) of moral interaction. We can, too obviously, become morally inaccessible to one another; but to tell us that these are the moments which really constitute the moral life will only add confusion to pain.

If not, then, by saying what actions *ought* to be performed, how

do we establish (or justify or modify or drop) rules or standards? What general answer can there be to this general question other than "In various ways, depending on the context"? Philosophers who have imagined that the question has one answer for all cases must be trying to assimilate the members of Football Commissions, of Child Development Research Teams, of University Committees on Entrance Requirements, of Bar Association Committees to Alter Legal Procedures, of Departments of Agriculture, of Bureaus of Standards, and of Essene Sects, all to one "sort" of person, doing one "sort" of thing, viz., establishing (or changing) rules and standards. Whereas the fact is that there are, in each case, different ways normative for accomplishing the particular normative tasks in question. It has in recent years been emphasized past acknowledgment that even justifications require justification. What now needs emphasizing is that (successfully) justifying a statement or an action is not (cannot be) justifying its justification.²¹ The assumption that the appeal to a rule or standard is only justified where that rule or standard is simultaneously established or justified can only serve to make such appeal seem hypocritical (or anyway shaky) and the attempts at such establishment or justification seem tyrannical (or anyway arbitrary).

It would be important to understand why we have been able to overlook the complementarity of rule and statement and to be content always to sort rules with imperatives. Part of the reason for this comes from a philosophically inadequate (not to say disastrous) conception of action; but this inadequacy itself will demand an elaborate accounting. There is another sort of reason for our assumption that what is binding upon us must be an imperative; one which has to do with our familiar sense of alienation from established systems of morality, perhaps accompanied by a sense of distance from God. Kant tells us that a perfectly rational being does in fact (necessarily) con-

²¹ It is perfectly possible to maintain that any "justifications" we offer for our conduct are now so obviously empty and grotesquely inappropriate that nothing we used to call a justification is any longer acceptable, and that the *immediate* questions which face us concern the ultimate ground of justification itself. We have heard about, if we have not seen, the breaking down of convention, the fission of traditional values. But it is not a Continental dread at the realization that our standards have no ultimate justification which lends to so much British and American moral philosophizing its hysterical quality. (Such philosophy has been able to take the death of God in its stride.) That quality comes, rather, from the assumption that the question of justifying cases is on a par with (appropriate in the same context as) the question of justifying norms.

form to "the supreme principle of morality," but that we imperfectly rational creatures are necessitated *by* it, so that for us it is (always appears as) an imperative. But if I understand the difference Kant sees here, it is one *within* the conduct of rational animals. So far as Kant is talking about (the logic of) action, his Categorical Imperative can be put as a Categorical Declarative (description-rule), i.e., description of what it *is* to act morally: When we (you) act morally, we act in a way we would regard as justified universally, justified no matter who had done it. (This categorial formulation does not tell us how to determine *what was done*; neither does Kant's categorial formulation, although, by speaking of "the" maxim of an action, it pretends to, or anyway makes it seem less problematical than it is.) Perhaps it is by now a little clearer why we are tempted to retort, "But suppose I don't *want* to be moral?"; and also why it would be irrelevant here. The Categorical Declarative does not tell you what you *ought* to do *if* you want to be moral (and hence is untouched by the feeling that no imperative can really be *categorical*, can bind us no matter what); it tells you (part of) what you in fact do when you *are* moral. It cannot—nothing a philosopher says can—insure that you will not act immorally; but it is entirely unaffected by what you do or do not want.

I am not saying that rules do not sometimes sort with imperatives, but only denying that they always do. In the Britannica article (eleventh edition) on chess, only one paragraph of the twenty or so which describe the game is headed "Rules," and only here are we told what we *must* do. This paragraph deals with such matters as the convention of saying "j'adoube" when you touch a piece to straighten it. Is the difference between matters of this kind and the matter of how pieces move, a difference between penalties (which are imposed for misplay) and moves (which are accepted in order to play at all)—so that we would cheerfully say that we can play (are playing) chess without the "j'adoube" convention, but less cheerfully that we can play without following the rule that "the Queen moves in any direction, square or diagonal, whether forward or backward"? This would suggest that we may think of the difference between rule and imperative as one between those actions (or "parts" of actions) which are easy (natural, normal) for us, and those we have to be encouraged to do. (What I do as a rule you may have to be made or directed to do.) We are likely to forget to say "j'adoube," so we have to be *made* (to re-

member) to do it; but we do not have to be *made* to move the Queen in straight, unobstructed paths.²² This further suggests that what is thought of as "alienation" is something which occurs *within* moral systems; since these are profoundly haphazard accumulations, it is no surprise that we feel part of some regions of the system and feel apart from other regions.²³

So the subject of responsibility, of obligation and commitment, opens into the set of questions having to do with differences between doing a thing wrongly or badly (strangely, ineptly, inexactly, partially . . .) and not doing the thing at all. These differences take us into a further region of the concept of an action: we have noted that there are many (specific) ways in which an action can go wrong (at least as many as the myriad excuses we are entitled to proffer when what we have done has resulted in some unhappiness); but it would be incorrect to suppose that we are *obligated* to see to it (to take precautions to insure), *whenever* we undertake to do anything, that none of these ways will come to pass. Our obligation is to avoid doing something at a time and place or in a way which is *likely* to result in some misfortune, or to avoid being careless where it is easy to be, or to be *especially* careful where the action is dangerous or delicate, or avoid the temptation to skip a necessary step when it seems in the moment to make little difference. If for *all* excuses there were relevant obligations, then there would be no excuses and action would become intolerable. Any *particular* excuse may be countered with a *specific* obligation; not even the best excuse will always get you off the hook (That is no excuse; you should have known that was likely

²² Though in another context we might have. Imagine that before chess was introduced into our culture, another game—call it Quest—had been popular with us. In that game, played on a board with 64 squares, and like chess in other respects, the piece called the Damsel had a fickle way of moving: its first move, and every odd move afterwards, followed the rule for the Queen in chess; its even moves followed the rule for the Knight. It may be supposed that when people began to play chess, it often happened that a game had to be stopped upon remembering that several moves earlier a Queen was permitted a Knight's move. The rule for the Queen's move might then have been formulated in some such way as: You must move the Queen in straight, unobstructed paths. . . .

²³ Perhaps this difference provides a way of accounting for our tendency sometimes to think of laws as rules and at other times to think of them as commands. This may (in part) depend upon where we—i.e., where our normal actions—stand (or where we imagine them to stand) with respect to the law or system of laws in question. It may also be significant that when you are describing a system of laws, you are likely to think of yourself as external to the system.

to result in an accident, you ought to have paid *particular* heed here, etc.).

Without pretending to give an account of (this part of) obligation, what I think the foregoing considerations indicate is this: a statement of what we *must* do (or say) has point only in the context (against the background) of knowledge that we are in fact doing (or saying) a thing, but doing (saying) it—or running a definite risk of doing or saying it—badly, inappropriately, thoughtlessly, tactlessly, self-defeatingly, etc.; or against the background of knowledge that we are in a certain position or occupy a certain office or station, and are *behaving* or *conducting ourselves* inappropriately, thoughtlessly, self-defeatingly. . . . The same is true of statements about what we *may* do, as well as those containing other “modal auxiliaries”—e.g., about what we *should* do, or what we *are* or *have* to do, or are *supposed* to do, and about one sense of what we *can* do; these are all intelligible only against the background of what we are doing or are in a position (one sense of “able”) to do. These “link verbs” share the linguistic peculiarity that while they are verb-like forms they cannot stand as the main verb of a sentence. This itself would suggest that their use is not one of prescribing some new action to us, but of setting an action which is antecedently relevant to what we are doing or to what we are—setting it relevantly into the larger context of what we are doing or of what we are.²⁴ “You must (are supposed, obliged, required to) move the Queen in straight paths . . .” or “You may (can, are allowed or permitted to) move the Queen in straight paths . . .” say (assert) no more than “You (do, in fact, always) move the Queen in straight paths . . .”; which of them you say on a given occasion depends not on any special motive or design of yours, nor upon any special mode of argument. There is no question of *going from* “is” to “must,” but only of appreciating which of them should be said when; i.e., of appreciating the position or circumstances of the person to whom you are speaking. Whatever makes one of the statements true makes them all true, though not all appropriate.

To tell me what I must do is not the same as to tell me what I

²⁴ But this requires a great deal of work. We must have a better description of the “class” and the function of “modal auxiliaries,” and we need an understanding of what makes something we do “another” action and what makes it “part” of an action in progress.

ought to do. I must move the Queen in straight paths (in case I am absent-minded and continue moving it like the Damsel; cf. n. 22). What would it mean to tell me that I *ought* to move the Queen in straight paths? "Ought," unlike "must," implies that there is an alternative; "ought" implies that you can, if you choose, do otherwise. This does *not* mean merely that there is something else to do which is in your *power* ("I *can* move the Queen like the Knight; just watch!") but that there is one within your *rights*. But if I say truly and appropriately, "You must . . ." then in a perfectly good sense nothing you then do can prove me wrong. You CAN *push the little object called the Queen* in many ways, as you can *lift* it or *throw* it across the room; not all of these will be *moving the Queen*. You CAN ask, "Was your action voluntary?" and say to yourself, "All I mean to ask is whether he had a sensation of effort just before he moved," but that will not be finding out whether the action was voluntary. Again, if I have borrowed money then I *must* (under normal circumstances) pay it back (even though it is rather painful).²⁵ It makes sense to tell me I *ought* to pay it back only if there is a specific reason to suppose, say, that the person from whom I got the money *meant to give* it to me rather than merely *lend* it (nevertheless he needs it badly, worse than I know), or if there is a reason to pay it back tomorrow instead of next week, when the debt falls due (I'll save interest; I'll only spend it and have to make another loan). The difference here resembles that between doing a thing and doing the thing well (thoughtfully, tactfully, sensibly, graciously . . .).

This difference may be made clearer by considering one way principles differ from rules. Rules tell you what to do when you do the thing at all; principles tell you how to do the thing well, with skill

²⁵ "Must" retains its logical force here. Kant may not have provided an analysis sufficient to sustain his saying that "a deposit of money must be handed back because if the recipient appropriated it, it would no longer be a deposit"; but Bergson too hastily concludes that Kant's explanation of this in terms of "logical contradiction" is "obviously juggling with words." See Bergson's *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, Inc., 1935), p. 77. The difference between your *depositing* and simply *handing over* some money has in part to do with what you mean or intend to be doing—and with what you *can* mean or intend by doing what you do in the way you do it in that particular historical context. We may, following a suggestion of H. P. Grice's ("Meaning," *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. LXVI, 1957), think of the actions of depositing and of accepting a deposit as complicated "utterances": you intend that what you do shall be understood. Then it will not seem so extraordinary to say that a later "utterance" (viz., appropriating the entrusted money) contradicts a former one (viz., accepting a deposit).

or understanding. In competitive games, acting well amounts to doing the sort of thing that will win, so the principles of games recommend strategy. "No raise should [N.B.] be given to partner's suit without at least Q-x-x, J-10-x, K-x-x, A-x-x, or any four trumps. . . ." But you could fail to adopt this and still play bridge, even play well. It is a principle of strategy in Culbertson's system;²⁶ but another expert may have a different understanding of the game and develop principles of strategy which are equally successful. Principles go with understanding. (Having an understanding of a game is not knowing the rules; you might find a book called *Principles of Economics* or *Psychology*, but none called *Rules of Economics*, etc.) Understanding a principle involves knowing how and where to apply it. But some moves seem so immediately to be called for by the principles of strategy, that their formulations come to be thought of as rules: Should we say, "The third hand plays high . . ." or "The third hand should play high . . ."? You may, strictly speaking, be playing bridge if you flout this, but you won't be doing the sort of thing which will win (and therefore not really playing? When is not doing a thing well not really doing the thing?). All players employ maxims (which may be thought of as formulating strategies as though they were moves) in order to facilitate their play; like everything habitual or summary, maxims have their advantages and their dangers. Both the rules which constitute playing the game, and the "rules" or maxims which contribute to playing the game well have their analogues in ordinary moral conduct.

I think it is sometimes felt that drawing an analogy between moral conduct and games makes moral conduct seem misleadingly simple (or trivial?), because there are no rules in moral conduct corresponding to the rules about how the Queen moves in chess.²⁷ But this

²⁶ Cited in *Hoyle Up-to-Date*, A. H. Morehead and G. Mott-Smith, eds. (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, Inc., 1950).

²⁷ Some philosophers who employ the notion of a rule have given the impression that there are. What I am suggesting is that even if there aren't, the analogy is still a good one. One of the claims made for the concept of a rule is that it illuminates the notion of justification; and critics of the concept argue that it fails in this and that therefore the concept is unilluminating in the attempt to understand moral conduct. I think both of these claims are improper, resulting in part from the failure to appreciate differences (1) between rules and principles, and (2) between performing an action and making some movements. The concept of rule does illuminate the concept of *action*, but not that of *justified action*. Where there is a question about what I do and I cite a rule in my favor, what I do is to *explain* my action, make clear *what* I was doing, not to *justify* it, say that what I did was well or rightly done. Where my action

misses the point of the analogy, which is that moves and actions have to be done *correctly*; not just any movement you make will be a move, or a promise, a payment, a request. This does not mean that promising is (just) following rules. Yet if someone is tempted not to fulfill a promise, you may say "Promises are kept," or "We keep our promises (that is the sort of thing a promise is)," thus employing a rule-description—what I have called a categorial declarative. You may say "You must keep this promise" (you are underestimating its importance; last time you forgot). This is not the same as "You ought to keep this promise," which is only sensible where you have a reason for breaking it strong enough to allow you to do so without blame (there is a real alternative), but where you are being enjoined to make a *special* effort or sacrifice. (This is partly why "You ought to keep promises" is so queer. It suggests that we not only always want badly to get out of fulfilling promises, but that we always have some good (anyway, *prima facie*) reason for not keeping them (perhaps our own severe discomfort) and that therefore we are acting *well* when we do fulfill. But we aren't, normally; neither well nor ill.) "Ought" is like "must" in requiring a background of action or position into which the action in question is set; and, like "must," it does not form a command, a pure imperative. All of which shows the hopelessness of speaking, in a *general* way, about the "normativeness" of expressions. The Britannica "rules" tell us what we *must* do in *playing* chess, not what we ought to do *if* we want to play. You (must) mean (imply), in speaking English, that something about an action is fishy when you say "The action is voluntary"; you (must) mean, when you ask a person "Ought you to do that?" that there is some *specific* way in which what he is doing might be done more tactfully, carefully, etc. . . . Are these imperatives? Are they categorical or hypothetical? Have you in no way contradicted yourself if you flout them? (Cf. n. 25.)

That "modal imperatives" ("must," "supposed to," "are to," "have to" . . .) require the recognition of a background action or

is in accord with the relevant rules, it needs no justification. Nor can it receive any: I cannot *justify* moving the Queen in straight, unobstructed paths. See John Rawls' study of this subject, "Two Concepts of Rules," *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. LXIV (1955). My unhappiness with the way in which the analogy is drawn does not diminish my respect for this paper. For a criticism (based, I think, on a misunderstanding) of the view, see H. J. McCloskey, "An Examination of Restricted Utilitarianism," *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. LXVI (1957).

position into which the relevant action is placed indicates a portentous difference between these forms of expression and pure imperatives, commands. Whether I can command depends only upon whether I have power or authority, and the only characteristics I must recognize in the object of the command are those which tell me that the object is subject to my power or authority. Employing a modal "imperative," however, requires that I recognize the object as a *person* (someone doing something or in a certain position) to whose reasonableness (reason) I appeal in using the second person. (Compare "Open, Sesame!" with "You must open, Sesame.") This is one reason that commands, pure imperatives, are not paradigms of moral utterance, but represent an alternative to such utterance.

* *

Without pretending that my argument for it has been nearly full or clear enough, let me, by way of summary, flatly state what it is I have tried to argue about the relation between what you say and what you (must) mean, i.e., between what you (explicitly) say and what saying it implies or suggests: If "what A (an utterance) means" is to be understood in terms of (or even as directly related to) "what is (must be) meant in (by) saying A,"²⁸ then the meaning of A will not be given by its analytic or definitional equivalents, nor by its deductive implications. Intension is not a substitute for intention. Although we would not call the statement "When we say we know something we imply (mean) that we have confidence, that we are in a position to say we know . . ." analytic, yet if the statement is true it is necessarily true in just this sense: if it is true, then when you ask what the statement supposes you to ask, you (must) mean what the statement says you (must) mean. Necessary and not analytic: it was—apart from the parody of Kant—to summarize, and partly explain, this peculiarity that I called such statements categorial declaratives: declarative, because something is (authoritatively) made known; categorial, because in telling us what we (must) mean by asserting that (or questioning whether) *x* is *F*, they tell us what it is for an *x* to be *F* (an

²⁸ Such an understanding of meaning is provided in Grice (op cit.), but I do not think he would be happy about the use I wish to put it to. A conversation we had was too brief for me to be sure about this, but not too brief for me to have added, as a result of it, one or two qualifications or clarifications of what I had said, e.g., the third point of note 31, note 32, and the independent clause to which the present note is attached.

action to be moral, a statement claiming knowledge to be a statement expressing knowledge, a movement to be a move).²⁰ Shall we say that such statements formulate the rules or the principles of grammar—the moves or the strategies of talking? And is this, perhaps, to be thought of as a difference between grammar and rhetoric? But becoming clearer about this will require us to see more clearly the difference between not doing a thing well (here, saying something) and not doing the thing; and between doing a thing badly and not doing the thing. The significance of categorial declaratives lies in their teaching or reminding us that the “pragmatic implications” of our utterances are (or, if we are feeling perverse, or tempted to speak carelessly, or chafing under an effort of honesty, let us say *must be*) *meant*; that they are an essential part of what we mean when we say something, of what it is to mean something. And what we mean (intend) to say, like what we mean (intend) to do, is something we are responsible for.

Even with this slight rehabilitation of the notion of normativeness, we can begin to see the special sense in which the philosopher who proceeds from ordinary language is “establishing a norm” in employing his second type of statement. He is certainly not *instituting* norms, nor is he *ascertaining* norms (see n. 20); but he may be thought of as *confirming* or *proving* the existence of norms when he reports or describes how we (how to) talk, i.e., when he says (in statements of the second type) what is normative for utterances instanced by statements of the first type. Confirming and proving are other regions of establishing. I have suggested that there are ways normative for instituting and for ascertaining norms; and so are there for confirming or proving or reporting them, i.e., for employing locutions like “We can say . . .,” or “When we say . . . we imply—.” The swift use made of them by the philosopher serves to remind mature speakers of a language of something they know; but they would erroneously be employed in trying to report a special usage of one’s own, and (not unrelated to this) could not be used to change the meaning of an expression. Since saying something is never *merely* saying something, but is saying something with a certain tune and at

²⁰ If truth consists in saying of what is that it is, then (*this* sense or source of) necessary truth consists in saying of what is *what* it is. The question, “Are these matters of language or matters of fact?” would betray the obsession I have tried to calm. I do not claim that this explanation of necessity holds for all statements which seem to us necessary and not analytic, but at best for those whose topic is actions and which therefore display a rule-description complementarity.

a proper cue and while executing the appropriate business, the sounded utterance is only a salience of what is going on when we talk (or the unsounded when we think); so a statement of "what we say" will give us only a feature of what we need to remember. But a native speaker will normally know the rest; learning it was part of learning the language.

Let me warn against two tempting ways to avoid the significance of this. (1) It is perfectly true that English might have developed differently than it has and therefore have imposed different categories on the world than it does; and if so, it would have enabled us to assert, describe, question, define, promise, appeal, etc., in ways other than we do. But using English now—to converse with others in the language, or to understand the world, or to think by ourselves—means knowing which forms in what contexts are normative for performing the activities we perform by using the language. (2) It is no escape to say: "Still I can say what I like; I needn't always use normal forms in saying what I say; I can speak in extraordinary ways, and you will perfectly well understand me." What this calls attention to is the fact that language provides us with ways for (contains forms which are normative for) speaking in special ways, e.g., for changing the meaning of a word, or for speaking, *on particular occasions*, loosely or personally, or paradoxically, cryptically, metaphorically. . . . Do you wish to claim that you can speak strangely yet intelligibly—and this of course means intelligibly to yourself as well—in ways not provided in the language for speaking strangely?

It may be felt that I have not yet touched one of Mates' fundamental criticisms. Suppose you grant all that has been said about an ordinary use being normative for what anyone says. Will you still wish to ask: "Does it follow that the ordinary uses which are normative for what professors say are the same as the ordinary uses which are normative for what butchers and bakers say?" Or perhaps: "Is an ordinary use for a professor an *ordinary* ordinary use?" Is that a sensible question?

To determine whether it is, we must appreciate what it is to talk together. The philosopher, understandably, often takes the isolated man bent silently over a book as his model for what using language is. But the primary fact of natural language is that it is something spoken, spoken together. Talking together is acting together, not making motions and noises at one another, nor transferring unspeak-

able messages or essences from the inside of one closed chamber to the inside of another. The difficulties of talking together are, rather, *real* ones: the activities we engage in by talking are intricate and intricately related to one another. I suppose it will be granted that the professor and the baker can talk together. Consider the most obvious complexities of cooperative activity in which they engage: there is commenting ("Nice day"); commending, persuading, recommending, enumerating, comparing ("The pumpernickel is good, but the whole wheat and the rye even better"); grading, choosing, pointing ("I'll have the darker loaf there"); counting, making change, thanking; warning ("Careful of the step"); promising ("Be back next week") . . . ; all this in addition to the whole nest or combination of actions which comprise the machinery of talking: asserting, referring, conjoining, denying, . . . Now it may be clearer why I wish to say: if the professors and the baker did not understand each other, the professors would not understand one another either.

You may still want to ask: "Does this mean that the professor and baker use particular words like 'voluntary' and 'involuntary,' or 'inadvertently' and 'automatically' the same way? The baker may never have used these words at all." But the question has *now* become, since it is about *specific* expressions, straightforwardly empirical. Here Mates' "two methods" (pp. 69ff.) at last become relevant. But I am at the moment less interested in determining what empirical methods would be appropriate to investigate the matter than I am in posing the following questions: What should we say if it turned out, as it certainly might, that they in fact do use the words differently? Should we, for example, say that therefore we never have a right to say that people use words in the same way without undertaking an empirical investigation; or perhaps say that therefore they speak different languages? What should make us say that they do not speak the same language? Do we really know what it would be like to embark upon an empirical investigation of the *general* question whether we (ordinarily, ever) use language the way other people do?

There is too much here to try to unravel. But here are some of the threads: The words "inadvertently" and "automatically," however recondite, are ordinary; there are ordinary contexts (nontechnical, nonpolitical, nonphilosophical contexts) which are normative for their use. It may be that half the speakers of English do not know

(or cannot say, which is not the same) what these contexts are. Some native speakers may even use them interchangeably. Suppose the baker is able to convince us that he does. Should we then say: "So the professor has no right to say how '*we* use' 'inadvertently,' or to say that when *we* use the one word we say something different from what we say when we use the other"? Before accepting that conclusion, I should hope that the following consideration would be taken seriously: When "inadvertently" and "automatically" seem to be used indifferently in recounting what someone did, this may not at all show that they are being used synonymously, but only that what each of them says is separately true of the person's action. The decanter is broken and you did it. You may say (and it may be important to consider that you are already embarrassed and flustered) either: "I did it inadvertently" or "I did it automatically." Are you saying the same thing? Well, you automatically *grabbed the cigarette* which had fallen on the table, and inadvertently *knocked over the decanter*. Naming actions is a sensitive occupation.³⁰ It is easy to overlook the distinction because the two adverbs often go together in describing actions in which a sudden movement results in some mishap.

Suppose the baker does not accept this explanation, but replies: "I use 'automatically' and 'inadvertently' in exactly the same way. I could just as well have said: 'I grabbed the cigarette inadvertently and knocked over the decanter automatically.'" Don't we feel the temptation to reply: "You may say this, but you can't say it and describe the same situation; you can't mean what you would mean if you said the other"? But suppose the baker insists he can? Will we then be prepared to say: "Well you can't say the one and mean what I mean by the other"? Great care would be needed in claiming this, for it may look like I am saying, "I know what I mean and I say they are different." But why is the baker not entitled to this argument? What I must not say is: "I know what words mean in *my* language." Here the argument would have pushed me to madness. It *may* turn out (depending upon just what the dialogue has been and where it was stopped) that we should say to the baker: "If you cooked the way you talk, you would forgo special implements for different jobs, and peel, core, scrape, slice, carve, chop, and saw, all with one knife. The

³⁰ Austin's work on Excuses provides a way of coming to master this immensely important idea. The way I have put the point here is due directly to it.

distinction is there, in the language (as implements are there to be had), and you just impoverish what you say by neglecting it. And there is something you aren't noticing about the world."³¹

But to a philosopher who refuses to acknowledge the distinction we should say something more: not merely that he impoverishes what he can say about actions, but that he is a poor theorist of what it is to do something. The philosopher who asks about everything we do, "Voluntary or not?" has a poor view of action (as the philosopher who asks of everything we say, "True or false?" or "Analytic or synthetic?" has a poor view of communication), in something like the way a man who asks the cook about every piece of food, "Was it cut or not?" has a poor view of preparing food. The cook with only one knife is in much better condition than the philosopher with only "Voluntary or involuntary?" to use in dividing actions, or "True or false?" to use in hacking out meaningful statements. The cook can get on with the preparation of the meal even if he must improvise a method here and there, and makes more of a mess than he would with more appropriate implements. But the philosopher can scarcely *begin* to do his work; there is no job the philosopher has to get on with; nothing ulterior he must do with actions (e.g., explain or predict them), or with statements (e.g., verify them). What he wants to know is what they are, what it is to do something and to say something. To the extent that he improvises a way of getting past the description and division of an action or a statement, or leaves a mess in his account—to that extent he leaves his own job undone. If the philosopher is trying to get clear about what preparing a meal is and asks the cook, "Do you cut the apple or not?", the cook may say, "Watch me!" and then core and peel it. "Watch me!" is what we should reply to the philosopher who asks of our normal, ordinary actions, "Volun-

³¹ Three points about this conclusion need emphasizing. (1) It was reached where the difference concerned isolated *words*; where, that is, the shared *language* was left intact. (2) The tasks to be performed (scraping, chopping, excusing a familiar and not very serious mishap) were such as to allow execution, if more or less crude, with a general or common implement. (3) The question was over the meaning of a word in general, not over its meaning (what it was used to mean) on a particular occasion; there was, I am assuming, no reason to treat the word's use on this occasion as a special one.

Wittgenstein's role in combatting the idea of privacy (whether of the meaning of what is said or what is done), and in emphasizing the *functions* and *contexts* of language, scarcely needs to be mentioned. It might be worth pointing out that these teachings are fundamental to American pragmatism; but then we must keep in mind how different their arguments sound, and admit that in philosophy it is the sound which makes all the difference.

tary or not?" and who asks of our ethical and aesthetic judgments, "True or false?" Few speakers of a language utilize the full range of perception which the language provides, just as they do without so much of the rest of their cultural heritage. Not even the philosopher will come to possess all of his past, but to neglect it deliberately is foolhardy. The consequence of such neglect is that our philosophical memory and perception become fixated upon a few accidents of intellectual history.



I have suggested that the question of "[verifying] an assertion that a given person uses a *word* in a given way or with a given sense" (Mates, *ibid.*, my emphasis) is not the same as verifying assertions that "We say . . ." or that "When we say . . . we imply—." This means that I do not take the "two basic approaches" which Mates offers in the latter part of his paper to be directed to the same question as the one represented in the title he gives to his paper (at least on my interpretation of that question). The questions are designed to elicit different types of information; they are relevant (have point) at different junctures of investigation. Sometimes a question is settled by asking others (or ourselves) what we say here, or whether we ever say such-and-such; on the basis of these data we can make statements like " 'Voluntary' is used of an action only where there is something (real or imagined) fishy about it." I take this to be a "statement about ordinary language" (and equally, about voluntary action). But surely it is not, under ordinary circumstances, an assertion about how a word is used by *me* (or "some given person"); it is a statement about how the word is used in English. Questions about how a given person is using some *word* can sensibly arise only where there is some specific reason to suppose that he is using the word in an unusual way. This point can be put the other way around: the statement "I (or some given person) use (used) the word X in such-and-such a way" implies (depending on the situation) that you intend (intended) to be using it in a special way, or that someone else is unthinkingly misusing it, or using it misleadingly, and so on. This is another instance of the principle that actions which are normal will not tolerate any special description. In a *particular* case you may realize that words are not to be taken normally, that some want or fear or special intention of the speaker is causing an aberration in the drift of his words. A little

girl who says to her brother, "You can have half my candy" may mean, "Don't take any!"; the husband who screams in fury, "Still no buttons!" may really be saying, "If I were honest, I'd do what Gauduin did." A knave or a critic or an heiress may say, "X is good" and mean, "I want or expect or command you to like (or approve of) X"; and we, even without a special burden of malice, or of taste, or of money, may sometimes find ourselves imitating them.

Mates interprets Ryle's assertion that the ordinary use of "voluntary" applies to actions which are disapproved to mean that "the ordinary man applies the word only to actions of which he disapproves" (p. 72); this apparently involves a reference to that man's personal "aims, feelings, beliefs, and hopes"; and these, in turn, are supposedly part merely of the pragmatics (not the semantics) of a word. It is therefore a mistake, Mates concludes, to claim that the philosopher is using the word in a "stretched, extraordinary *sense*" (ibid., my emphasis) merely on the ground that he may not happen to feel disapproving about an action he calls voluntary. The mistake, however, is to suppose that the ordinary use of a word is a function of the internal state of the speaker. (It is sometimes to emphasize that your remarks about "use" are not remarks about such states that you want to say you are talking about the *logic* of ordinary language.) Another reason for the tenacity of the idea that a statement of what we mean when we say so-and-so (a statement of the second type) must be synthetic is that we suppose it to be *describing* the mental processes of the person talking. To gain perspective on that idea, it may be of help to consider that instead of saying to the child who said he *knew* (when we knew he had no right to say so), "You mean you *think* so," we might have said, "You *don't* know (or, That is not what it is to know something); you just think so." This says neither more nor less than the formulation about what he *means*, and neither of them is a description of what is going on inside the child. They are both statements which teach him what he has a *right* to say, what knowledge is.

Mates tells us (ibid.) that his "intensional approach" is meant, in part, "to do justice to the notions (1) that what an individual means by a word depends at least in part upon what he wants to mean by that word, and (2) that he may have to think awhile before he discovers what he 'really' means by a given word." With respect to the first notion, I should urge that we do justice to the fact that an indi-

vidual's intentions or wishes can no more produce the general meaning for a word than they can produce horses for beggars, or home runs from pop flies, or successful poems out of unsuccessful poems.³² This may be made clearer by noticing, with respect to the second notion, that often when an individual is thinking "what he 'really' means" (in the sense of having second thoughts about something), he is not thinking what he really means by a given *word*. You have second thoughts in such cases just because you cannot make words mean what you wish (*by wishing*); it is for that reason that what you say on a given occasion may not be what you really mean. To say what you really mean you will have to say something different, change the words; or, as a special case of this, change the meaning of a word. Changing the meaning is not wishing it were different. This is further confirmed by comparing the locutions "X means YZ" and "I mean by X, YZ." The former holds or fails to hold, whatever I wish to mean. And the latter, where meaning does depend on me, is performative;³³ something I am doing to the word X, not something I am wishing about it.

What these remarks come to is this: it is not clear what such an activity as my-finding-out-what-I-mean-by-a-word would be. But there obviously is finding-out-what-a-word-means. You do this by consulting a dictionary or a native speaker who happens to know. There is also something we may call finding-out-what-a-word-really-means. This is done when you already know what the dictionary can teach you; when, for some reason or other, you are forced into philosophizing. Then you begin by recollecting the various things we should say were such-and-such the case. Socrates gets his antagonists to withdraw their definitions not because they do not know what their words mean, but because they do know what they (their words) mean, and therefore know that Socrates has led them into paradox. (How could

³² I am not, of course, denying that what you say depends upon what you intend to be saying. I am, rather, denying that intending is to be understood as a wanting or wishing. And I am suggesting that you could not mean one thing rather than another (= you could not mean anything) by a given word on a given occasion without relying on a (general) meaning of that word which is independent of your intention on that occasion (unless what you are doing is *giving* the word a special meaning). For an analysis of meaning in terms of intention, see Grice, *op. cit.*

³³ Or else it is a *special* report, like the one on p. 37, lines 29f; but it is still not a description of my wishes or intentions. The best place to find out what a "performative" is is Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962). See also "Other Minds," *Logic and Language*, 2nd series, pp. 142ff.

I be led into a paradox if I could mean what I wished by my words? Because I must be consistent? But how could I *be inconsistent* if words would mean what I wanted them to mean?) What they had not realized was what they were saying, or, what they were *really* saying, and so had not known *what they meant*. To this extent, they had not known themselves, and not known the world. I mean, of course, the ordinary world. That may not be all there is, but it is important enough: morality is in that world, and so are force and love; so is art and a part of knowledge (the part which is about that world); and so is religion (wherever God is). Some mathematics and science, no doubt, are not. This is why you will not find out what "number" or "neurosis" or "mass" or "mass society" mean if you only listen for our ordinary uses of these terms.³⁴ But you will never find out what voluntary action is if you fail to see when we should say of an action that it is voluntary.

One may still feel the need to say: "Some actions *are* voluntary and some are involuntary. It would be convenient (for what?) to call all actions voluntary which are not involuntary. Surely I can call them anything I like? Surely what I *call* them doesn't affect what they *are*?" Now: How will you tell me what "they" are? ³⁵ What we need to ask ourselves here is: In what sort of situations does it make no difference what I call a thing? or: At what point in a dialogue does it become natural or proper for me to say, "I (you) can call it what I (you) like"? At this point it may be safe to say that the question is (has become) verbal.³⁶ If you really have a way of telling just what is denoted by "all actions which are not involuntary," then you can call them anything you like.



I just tried to characterize the situation in which we ordinarily ask, "What does X mean?" and to characterize the *different* situation in which we ask, "What does X really mean?" These questions nei-

³⁴ This may be summarized by saying that there is no such thing as *finding out* what a number, etc., is. This would then provide the occasion and the justification for logical construction.

³⁵ Cf. D. F. Pears, "Incompatibilities of Colours," *Logic and Language*, 2nd series, p. 119, n. 2.

³⁶ One of the best ways to get past the idea that philosophy's concern with language is a concern with words (with "verbal" matters) is to read Wisdom. Fortunately it is a pleasant way; because since the idea is one that you have to get past again and again, the way past it will have to be taken again and again.

ther conflict nor substitute for one another, though philosophers often take the second as a profound version of the first—perhaps to console themselves for their lack of progress. Isn't this part of the trouble about synonymy? "Does X *really* mean the same as Y?" is not a profound version of "Does X mean the same as Y?" It (its occasion) is, though related to the first in obvious and devious ways, different. The same goes for the pair: "What did he do?" and "What did he really (literally) *do*?"; and for the pair: "What do you see?" and "What do you *really* (immediately) *see*?"; and for the pair: "Is the table solid?" and "Is the table *really* (absolutely) solid?" Since the members of the pairs are *obviously* different, philosophers who do not see that the difference in the second members lies in their occasions, in where and when they are posed, handsomely provide special entities, new worlds, for them to be about. But this can only perpetrate—it will not penetrate—a new reality.

The profoundest as well as the most superficial questions can be understood only when they have been placed in their natural environments. (What makes a statement or a question profound is not its placing but its timing.) The philosopher is no more magically equipped to remove a question from its natural environment than he is to remove himself from any of the conditions of intelligible discourse. Or rather, he may remove himself, but his mind will not follow. This, I hope it is clear, does not mean that the philosopher will not eventually come to distinctions, and use words to mark them, at places and in ways which depart from the currently ordinary lines of thought.³⁷ But it does suggest that (and why) when his recommendations come too fast, with too little attention to the particular problem for which we have gone to him, we feel that instead of thoughtful advice we have been handed a form letter. Attention to the details of cases as they arise may not provide a quick path to an all-embracing system; but at least it promises genuine instead of spurious clarity.

Some philosophers will find this program too confining. Philosophy, they will feel, was not always in such straits; and it will be difficult for them to believe that the world and the mind have so terribly altered that philosophy must relinquish old excitements to science and to poetry. There, it may be claimed, new uses are still invented by profession, and while this makes the scientist and the poet harder to

³⁷ As Austin explicitly says. (See "A Plea for Excuses," p. 133.)

understand initially, it enables them eventually to renew and to deepen and to articulate our understanding. No wonder the philosopher will gape at such band wagons. But he must sit still. Both because, where he does not wish to invent (hopes not to invent), he is not entitled to the rewards and licenses of those who do; and because he would otherwise be running from his peculiar task—one which has become homelier perhaps, but still quite indispensable to the mind. The “unwelcome consequences” (Mates, p. 67) which may attend using words in ways which are (have become) privately extraordinary are just that our understanding should lose its grasp. Not only is it true that this can happen without our being aware of it, it is often very difficult to become aware of it—like becoming aware that we have grown pedantic or childish or slow. The meaning of words *will*, of course, stretch and shrink, and they will be stretched and be shrunk. One of the great responsibilities of the philosopher lies in appreciating the natural and the normative ways in which such things happen, so that he may make us aware of the one and capable of evaluating the other. It is a wonderful step towards understanding the abutment of language and the world when we see it to be a matter of convention. But this idea, like every other, endangers as it releases the imagination. For some will then suppose that a private meaning is not more arbitrary than one arrived at publicly, and that since language inevitably changes, there is no reason not to change it arbitrarily. Here we need to remind ourselves that ordinary language is natural language, and that its changing is natural. (It is unfortunate that artificial language has come to seem a general *alternative* to natural language;³⁸ it would, I suggest, be better thought of as one of its capacities.) Some philosophers, apparently, suppose that because natural language is “constantly” changing it is too unstable to support one exact thought, let alone a clear philosophy. But this Heraclitean anxiety is unnecessary: linguistic change is itself an object of respectable study. And it misses the significance of that change. It is exactly

³⁸ This sometimes appears to be the only substantive agreement between the philosophers who proceed from ordinary language and those who proceed by constructing artificial languages. But this may well be obscuring their deeper disagreements, which are, I believe, less about language than about whether the time has come to drag free of the philosophical tradition established in response to, and as part of, the “scientific revolution” of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. I have found instruction about this in conversations with my friend and now former colleague Thomas S. Kuhn, to whom I am also indebted for having read (and forced the re-writing of) two shorter versions of this paper.

because the language which contains a culture changes with the changes of that culture that philosophical awareness of ordinary language is illuminating; it is that which explains how the language we traverse every day can contain undiscovered treasure. To see that ordinary language is natural is to see that (perhaps even see why) it is normative for what can be said. And also to see how it is by searching definitions that Socrates can coax the mind down from self-assertion—subjective assertion and private definition—and lead it back, through the community, home. That this also renews and deepens and articulates our understanding tells us something about the mind, and provides the consolation of philosophers.

Professor Mates, at one point in his paper, puts his doubts about the significance of the claims of ordinary language this way: "Surely the point is not merely that if you use the word 'voluntary' just as the philosopher does, you may find yourself entangled in the philosophic problem of the Freedom of the Will" (p. 67). Perhaps the reason he thinks this a negligible consequence is that he hears it on analogy with the assertion, "If you use the term 'space-time' just as the physicist does, you may find yourself entangled in the philosophic problem of simultaneity." The implication is that the problem must simply be faced, not avoided. I, however, hear the remark differently: If you use alcohol just as the alcoholic does, or pleasure as the neurotic does, you may find yourself entangled in the practical problem of the freedom of the will.