AN ESSAY ON THE CONCEPT OF MEANING *

The place of Meaning in modern philosophy and logic and the elucidation of its differents meanings.

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Delimitation of the subject-matter

The aim of this dissertation is to contribute to the elucidation of the meaning of the highly ambiguous word *'Meaning'*. The dissertation remains within the following boundaries :

a) Only *"cognitive meaning"* is taken into consideration, while non-cognitive meaning is kept wholly outside.

b) 'Meaning' is analysed exclusively from a philosophical and logical point of view; i.e. the analysis of meaning is considered as a purely *philosophical problem*. Empirical investigations in this field such as those pertaining to psychology and sociology are excluded.

c) Particular consideration is taken of *the import of Meaning for Philosophy* (especially for the *theory of knowledge*).

d) The analysis of meaning is conducted also with the aim of establishing a satisfactory *conceptual scheme* for the construction of (interpreted or uninterpreted) *formalized languages*.

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Part I.

Philosophy and Meaning

It is aimed in this Part to define Philosophy and, in this way to show the fundamental importance of Meaning in this realm. In this respect the following results are obtained :

(1) Philosophy is a quest for *knowledge.*

(2) Its *subject-matter* is *universal* (all-embracing).

(3) Its *aim* is the securing of *reliable (or warranted) knowledge.* (This aim is sufficient for distinguishing philosophy from all other disciplines, which can provide only "unwarranted" knowledge.)

(4) All knowledge outside philosophy is based on *"presuppositions"*, that is, on intuitively self-evident statements used for the substantiation of all other statements, which are themselves "uncorroborated".

(5) All knowledge based on such presuppositions is essentially "unwarranted".

(6) The *aim* of philosophy is, consequently, to secure *"presuppositionless" knowledge.*

(7) The necessary and suficient condition for any cognitive discipline to be "presupposionless", is that all its primitive terms be *defined,* i.e. that their *meaning* be *wholly elucidated.*

(8) The *method* of philosophy is consequently the *elucidation of the meaning of the primitive terms* of all cognitive disciplines (common sense knowledge, scientific theories and metaphysical systems).

(9) The transformation of any cognitive discipline into one which is wholly presuppositionless (and consequently has all its terms defined) is called a *"presuppositionless reconstruction"* of that discipline. So we can say that the task of philosophy consists in the presuppositionless reconstruction of all cognitive disciplines originally based on presuppositions (and consequently yielding only "unwarranted" knowledge).

Part II.

Semantics and the meanings of 'meaning'

The aim of this Part is the analysis of the word 'Meaning'. It is found that this word (even when confined to the sense of "cognitive meaning") has several radically different meanings. Following results are established :

(1) When one speaks of *the meaning* of a given linguistic expression, one may have in mind a given *entity* which is considered as *The Meaning* of that expression. But it is also possible to refer to the meaning of some expression, without believing in the least that there exists such an abstract object as "The Meaning" of the expression. In the first case the term 'Meaning' is taken in a *"categorematic"* sense, in the second case in a *"syncategorematic"* one. In the latter case, the meaning of an expression is interpreted as consisting merely in the *use* of the mentioned expression. We shall label the word 'Meaning' when taken in the categorematic sense with double quotes in order to distinguish it from its use in the syncategorematic sense. So while the *"Meaning"* of a given term is taken to be a determinate entity; the word 'meaning' in its syncategorematic use is considered as an "incomplete symbol" which has sense only in such contexts as *'has meaning'*, *'has the same meaning as'*, *'knows the meaning of'*, *'elucidates the meaning of'* and so on.

(2) 'Meaning' (in its categorematic sense) is either a (binary) *relation* term or else a (singulary) *functor*.

(3) There is further two basically different senses of "meaning" itself, which are distinguished respectively by the superscript '1' and '2'. The *"meaning*^{1}*"* of a given term consists of the object or objects it denotes (or refers to), while its *"meaning*^{2}*"* consists of that factor which is responsible for its meaningfulness. (That is called the "factor of significance" of the considered term.)

(4) The "meaning^{1}" of a *singular term* (i.e. any expression which can be the *subject* but never the predicate of a statement) consists in the object *"designated"* by this term; while the "meaning^{1}" of

a *general term* (i.e. any expression which can be the *predicate* but never the subject of a statement) consists of the sundry objects to which it *"applies"* (or "of which it is true"). The study of "meaning[1]" is precisely that which Quine calls the *"theory of reference"*.

(5) "The meaning[2]" of a singular term is its *"sense"* (Sinn) in Frege's terminology. On the other hand, the "meaning[2]" of a general term consists in the attribute *connoted* (in Mill's sense) by it, i.e. it is nothing but its *"connotation"*. Finally the "meaning[2]" of a *statement* (that is, of a "declarative sentence") is considered to consist in the *"proposition"* (interpreted as an objective abstract entity) expressed by it. The term *'intension'* is used synonymously with the expression "meaning[2]". 'Intension' is consequently a (binary) *relation* term or else a (singulary) *functor*. The study of "intension" (or "meaning[2]" is called the *"Semantical Theory of Significance"*. It is shown that such a theory gives rise to an extremely intricate ontology (better called a "mythology"). This unnecessary multiplication of abstract entities must be countered by the application of Ockham's razor.

(6) While the notion of *"meaning[1]"* (and consequently the *theory of reference)* is absolutuely indispensable for a correct analysis of the use of language, the notion of "meaning[2]" or "intension" can be wholly abandoned without any important loss. Indeed the "Semantical Theory of Significance" explains the significance of linguistic expressions in no better way than Moliere's Physician who explained the fact that opium causes sleep by means of its "dormitive virtue"! Taking this into consideration, the "Semantical Theory of Significance" is declared to be illegitimate, and so *Semantics* (defined as the theory of "meaning") is confined exclusively to the *"Theory of Reference."*

Part III.

Understanding and Definition

This part deals with Meaning taken in its syncategorematic sense. Such a study corresponds to Quine's *"theory of meaning"*. This can be considered as a *"syntactical and pragmatical theory of significance"*. Following results are established in this Part :

(1) The basic contexts in which the word 'meaning' occurs consist in the expressions *'knowing the meaning'* and *'elucidating the meaning'*. The words 'understanding' and 'definition' are considered merely as respective abbreviations of above mentioned expressions. ('To understand = *df* to know the meaning', 'to define = *df* to elucidate the meaning'.)

(2) We don't understand a word *because* it is significant, but rather we say that it is significant if and only if we are capable of knowing its meaning, i.e. of understanding it.

(3) A given expression is considered to be *"defined"* if and only if we *understand* it *exhaustively*. *Definition* is nothing but *full understanding*.

(4) 'Meaning', 'understanding' and 'definition' are always *relative to a language*.

(5) No expression belonging to an unformalized language is capable of being defined inside that language. Definitions (if possible at all) can be given only for the symbols of formalized languages.

(6) The necessary and sufficient condition for the *definability* of a symbol belonging to a given language, consists in the *possibility of determining the truth value* of all statements of that language in which the symbol occurs, provided the necessary factual information is secured.

(7) The axioms and rules of inference (or *"meaning postulates"*) of a given formalized language are capable (in principle) of securing the determination of the truth value of all ils statements (whenever the required factual information is provided). Consequently such axioms, rules or postulates can be considered as an *"implicit definition"* of all the primitive symbols of the formalized language.

(8) No implicit definition can consist merely of fully expressed statements or rules. *"Unverbalized rules"* are also required. Indeed the rules of inference (such as Gentzen's schemata for his theory of natural deduction) can be considered as unverbalized rules learned by means of examples.

(9) Explicit definitions (which are mere "rules of elimination")

are never capable of securing the determination of the truth value of all the statements of a given language. They are merely "truth-transferring" definitions, not "truth-generating" ones. "Explicit definitions" are not genuine definitions at all, since they cannot serve alone (i.e. without the help of implicit definition) to elucidate the meaning of any term. All they can do is to explain the meaning of a given symbol in terms of the meaning of some other ones (ultimately in terms of the "primitive symbols").

(10) Besides the above mentioned "explicit" and "implicit" definitions, there are also the so called *"semantical definitions"*, that is, rules determining the meaning of the primitive descriptive terms of a language. In this way, singular terms are definiable by means of semantical rules of designation, while general terms are definable by means of semantical rules of application. However a (semantical) rule of designation or aplication does not always constitute a definition. Indeed any rule using undefined expressions of the semantical metalanguage is *not* a "definition". Therefore all semantical definitions must be based ultimately upon *"unverbalized semantical rules"*. The *ostensive* learning of observation terms secures indeed such unverbalized rules.

(11) Three kinds of formalized languages, namely «uninterpreted", "partially interpreted" and "fully interpreted" ones are distinguished. Pure mathematics (as well as all kinds of formal or purely deductive theories) can be expressed by means of the first, while theories with an empirical content (i.e. those belonging to the natural sciences) are expressible by means of the second kind of languages.

(12) In case of an *"uninterpreted" formalized language,* all "defined" symbols are eliminable by means of *"explicit definitions"*. The remaining primitive symbols are defined by means of an *"implicit definition"* based on axioms and rules of inference. These rules must be "unverbalized" or else the syntactical language in which they are formalized must be itself a formalized language. Consequently, an infinite regress is avoided only by an ultimate recourse to "unverbalized" rules.

(13) In case of a *"partially interpreted" formalized language* (that is, of a system consisting of two different languages, one "uninterpreted" and the other "fully interpreted", which are

paired by means of "rules of correspondence"), the primitive symbols of the *theoretical language* (i.e. of the "uninterpreted" part of the system) are defined by means of an "implicit definition" based on the axioms and rules of inference of the uninterpreted language as well as on the rules of correspondence. By means of the latter, such symbols gain an "empirical" meaning.

(14) In case of a *"fully interpreted" formalized language* (or *"observation language"*), the primitive (descriptive) terms are defined by means of (ultimately) *unverbalized semantical rules* of designation and application while the logical constants are defined "syntactically" (i.e. as "uninterpreted symbols") by means of an implicit definition based on logical axioms and rules of inference. By adding also "meaning postulates" for the descriptive terms, "analyticity" can be defined for such a language. (In this case the "descriptive" terms are defined both by *"semantical definitions"* based on the rules of designation and application as well as by means of an *"implicit definition"* based on the "meaning postulates" for descriptive terms.)

(15) Since it is possible in this way to define all the symbols of any of the three kind of formalized languanges, it will also be possible to transform the language of any formal or empirical science into a formalized one, all symbols of which are defined. In this way, the *"presuppositionless reconstruction"* of any cognitive discipline, and consequently the establishment of a *"Presuppositionless Philosophy"* is shown to be in principle possible.