

**The Breath of Sense:
Language, Structure, and the Paradox of Origin**

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Within contemporary analytic philosophy, at least, varieties of “naturalism” have attained a widespread dominance. In this essay I suggest, however, that a closer look at the history of the linguistic turn in philosophy can offer helpful terms for rethinking what we mean in applying the categories of “nature” and “culture” within a philosophical reflection on human life and practice. For, as I argue, the central experience of this history—namely, philosophy’s transformative encounter with what it envisions as the logical or conceptual structure of everyday language – also repeatedly demonstrates the existence of a fundamental aporia or paradox at the center of the claim of language upon an ordinary human life. I discuss the occurrence of this aporia, and attempts to resolve it, in the philosophical writing of Carnap, Quine, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and McDowell. I conclude that the prevailing naturalistic style in analytic philosophy, whatever its recommendations, is itself the outcome of an unsuccessful attempt to resolve the central aporia of twentieth-century philosophical reflection on language. Closer attention to this aporia reveals that language, as we find it in both theoretical and everyday reflection, is in the most important sense, neither essentially “natural” nor “cultural.”

Within contemporary analytic philosophy, varieties of “naturalism” have recently attained a widespread methodological and thematic dominance. As David Papineau wrote in the introduction to his 1993 book *Philosophical Naturalism*, “nearly everybody nowadays wants to be a naturalist,” although as Papineau also notes, those who aspire to the term also continue to disagree widely about what specific methods or doctrines it entails.¹ My purpose in this paper, however, is not to argue for or against philosophical naturalism on any of the several conceptions current, but rather simply to suggest that a closer look at the history of the analytic tradition can offer helpful terms for rethinking what we can mean in applying the categories of “nature” and “culture” within a philosophical reflection on the constitutive forms of human life and practice. For, as I shall argue, the central experience of this history – namely, philosophy’s radical and transformative encounter with what it envisions as the logical or conceptual *structure* of everyday language – also repeatedly demonstrates the existence of a fundamental aporia or paradox of origin and practice at the center of the claim of language upon an ordinary human life. The consequences of this aporia have repeatedly determined the results and projects of the analytic tradition, even as analytic philosophers have also reacted to it, on the level of positive theory, in characteristic modes of dismissal, denial, or repression.² Besides offering to elicit more clearly what analytic philosophy still offers to show us about our

everyday relation to the language that we speak, I shall argue, that documenting this aporia can also yield a clarified understanding of the relationship of the analytic tradition to the neighboring streams of “continental” philosophy that have also taken up the question of language and its relation to life.

I.

Contemporary adherents to “naturalism” within analytic philosophy often trace the lineage of their own project to the work of W.V.O. Quine, who in an influential 1969 article called for the replacement of traditional epistemology with a “naturalized” epistemology that seeks a wholly scientific explanation of the production and fixation of belief and its expression in behavior.³ Once we abandon the traditional foundationalist project of attempting to account for knowledge by reducing it to a basis in immediately given sense-data, Quine argues,

Epistemology ... simply falls into place as a chapter of psychology and hence of natural science. It studies a natural phenomenon, viz., a physical human subject. This human subject is accorded a certain experimentally controlled input – certain patterns of irradiation in assorted frequencies, for instance – and in the fullness of time the subject delivers as output a description of the three-dimensional external world and its history.⁴

In calling for such a naturalization of epistemology, Quine also recommended it as a replacement for the “traditional” position of epistemology as a “first philosophy” in terms of which all our knowledge of the world is ultimately grounded. There are no philosophical terms, Quine suggested, for the justification or evaluation of claims of knowledge more fundamental than those of the natural sciences themselves; accordingly, abandoning the foundationalist project ought to allow us to replace traditional questions about justification with purely empirical questions about the causal route from stimulus to belief and its expression. Quine’s suggestion for a naturalized epistemology caused philosophers, almost immediately, to begin to rethink the aims, tasks, and ambitions of the traditional project of describing the ultimate sources and foundations of empirical knowledge; and even beyond epistemology itself, varieties of his methodological moral have become ubiquitous in contemporary analytic investigations of mind, language, and meaning. But we can gain more insight into the broader implications of this methodological shift by considering the actual historical basis of the attack

on foundationalist epistemology that led Quine to his claim for naturalized epistemology to begin with.

The immediate target of Quine's attack in "Epistemology Naturalized" is indeed the foundationalist project of *reducing* empirical knowledge to a basis in immediately given experience; but closer historical attention to the reasoning behind Quine's attack reveals the broader logical and semantic issues that provided its backdrop and motivation. In the paper, Quine describes some of the longstanding empiricist antecedents of the modern forms of the foundationalist project, but his direct and most specific target is its formulation in the jointly epistemological and logical-analytical project of his own teacher and mentor, Rudolf Carnap. Significantly, however, Carnap's own version of epistemological foundationalism was itself deeply grounded in a particular picture of the nature of language and linguistic meaning, widely shared by the early practitioners of what would come to be called 'analytic philosophy'; and it was in his critical reaction to *this* picture that Quine's own larger criticism of Carnap's project, of which the "Epistemology Naturalized" article is just an example, was historically and philosophically grounded. This picture is the *structuralist* picture of language, according to which language as a whole consists in a system or structure of rules governing the intercombination and regular use of signs. The internal contradictions of this natural and tempting picture of language and meaning were immediately responsible for both Quine's attack on Carnap's foundationalism and for one of his own most significant original results.

Quine's critical reaction to Carnap's picture of language, developed over the twenty-five years from Quine's first published writings on Carnap in the 1930s to *Word and Object* in 1960, operated by evincing (as we shall see in more detail in the following) an original and far-reaching paradox concerning the possibility of *analyzing* language, or of giving a description of its constitutive structure, origin, and the basis of the meaning of its terms. Although Quine's development of this paradox certainly provided sufficient grounds for doubting Carnap's *conventionalist* picture of the institution and structure of language, it does not go so far as to suggest that a *naturalistic* picture of language or meaning can fare any better. Indeed, whatever the prospects for naturalism within the restricted domain of epistemology, appreciation of the broader historical and philosophical setting of Quine's critique of Carnap should lead us to take a dim view of the prospects for a "naturalized" semantics or theory of meaning. Instead, Quine's critique tends to demonstrate the deep and fundamental paradoxes that continue to

accompany our references to language, whether deployed in sophisticated philosophical theory or employed in the most everyday occasions of an ordinary human life.

According to the picture which Carnap had propounded beginning in *Logical Syntax of Language* of 1934, any language is specified in full by a description of the *rules* for forming sequences of signs (Carnap called these the “formation” rules) together with the rules for deriving sign sequences from one another, which Carnap called “transformation” rules.⁵ Moreover, the totality of the formation and transformation rules is, according to Carnap, capable of *determining* without remainder (what we will then intuitively grasp as) the “meaning” of the language’s non-empirical terms; to say that a term has such-and-such a meaning is then simply to say that its use is determined by certain specific, conventional rules of use. This conception of the grounding of meaning provides the philosopher the possibility of two kinds of analytic work. First, it makes possible philosophical analysis of *actual* “natural” languages in order to determine their overall structure and the actual underlying meaning of their terms. Second, and just as significantly, it enables the philosopher or creative logician to propose and propound wholly *new* or “artificial” languages or language frameworks, simply by *laying down by stipulation* the formation and transformation rules determining the use of their terms. In the case of actually existing natural languages, the way we use terms may initially be bound by pre-existing stipulations or conventions; but it is always possible, according to Carnap, for us to specify or stipulate more exactly the intended meanings, even of familiar terms, by laying down new rules as the need arises. Indeed, the conception of *all* languages (natural as well as artificial) as essentially consisting in freely instituted calculi or structures of rules was crucial to Carnap’s conventionalism about linguistic and logical investigations more generally. On this position, as Carnap put it, there is no single “right” or “true” logic of language; the solution to logical questions is, rather, to be determined by means of the specification of rules for the formation and intercombination of sign sequences, rules which can in principle, Carnap supposed, *always* be conventionally stipulated without recourse to any sense of the already existing meanings of the terms in question. For the stipulation of such rules will *itself* determine, Carnap held, what we may then recognize as the “meanings” of the non-empirical terms of the language; the freedom of the reconstructive or constructive logician in freely proposing languages is thus in principle unrestrained in positing and creating arbitrarily many new language frameworks for the specific purposes at hand.

Significantly, for Carnap, then, the actual underlying rules of use, whether freely stipulated in instituting a language or determined later on by the reconstructive linguist, licensed a distinction between the *analytic* truths of the language – those made true simply by those rules themselves – and the *synthetic* truths of language which were seen as depending on empirical evidence or verification. Carnap assumed that it would always be possible for a theorist to draw this distinction (in a way consistent with the actual use of the language in question); and it was this assumption that provided the most central object of Quine's criticism, beginning in his 1934 lectures on Carnap and culminating in the notorious 1950 article "Two Dogmas of Empiricism." For beginning with his first writings, Quine constantly emphasized that a theorist's analysis of an actually existing language can always only *explicate* – and essentially can go no *further* than – the actual facts concerning how terms are in fact used by the speakers of the language.⁶ Thus, any theoretician's reconstruction of the constitutive rules thought to determine the underlying structure of the language can be justified (if at all) only by the theoretician's claim to exhibit rules capturing, *uniquely and sufficiently*, the actual facts of linguistic use. But as Quine argued in "Two Dogmas," with respect to any actually *used* or *spoken* language, the theoretician's reconstructive decision as to *which* sentences actually used by the speakers to take as analytic – which, in other words, to characterize as following simply from the rules of the language itself – will always, and necessarily, depend upon the *theorist's* sense for the synonymy and meaning of terms, as they are actually used in the practice of the language's speakers.⁷ And there is no reason to suppose, he suggested in "Two Dogmas," that this sense can amount, with respect to the actual facts of linguistic use, to anything more than a free theoretical projection. If, though, the determination of analyticity must thus always be to some degree arbitrary, then it is impossible for the theoretician uniquely to determine, for any actually used language, its "real" constitutive and underlying rules of use. The conventionalist picture of languages as calculi capable of being freely instituted by laying down the constitutive rules of use, which is essential to Carnap's analytic project in all of its versions, is thereby revealed as a theoretician's fiction, and the project of analysis it underlies revealed as futile.

It was, in fact, just this objection to Carnap's conventionalism that would eventually lead Quine to his most important semantic result, the thesis that in what Quine called the situation of radical translation, any systematic translation of an alien language will be systematically indeterminate, even given *all* of the facts of actual linguistic usage accessible, in principle, to

empirical investigation. The thesis of indeterminacy, first formulated in 1960 in *Word and Object*, generalizes Quine's initial objections to Carnap's picture into the broader-ranging claim that *any* systematic determination of the rules underlying the "meanings" of words in a language—what Quine now called a "translation manual" for the language as a whole – will in fact depend on a host of arbitrary decisions ungrounded in the facts themselves. To illustrate the difficulty, Quine imagines the plight of the field linguist whose task is to make sense of an alien language of which he has no antecedent knowledge. Such a linguist, if he is indeed initially innocent of the language under consideration, is necessarily required to derive his conclusions about the right translations of the native terms entirely from the evidentiary basis provided by his observations of the natives' speech behavior, in response to various empirically observable stimuli and conditions. Quine's result is that translation, under this condition, is systematically indeterminate, for:

Manuals for translating one language into another can be set up in divergent ways, all compatible with the totality of speech dispositions, yet incompatible with one another. In countless places they will diverge in giving, as their respective translations of a sentence of the one language, sentences of the other language which stand to each other in no plausible sort of equivalence however loose.⁸

The result marks the definitive failure of Carnap's attempt to conceive of any actually used or interpreted language as a calculus, definable by specific and unique rules accessible to neutral investigation. For as Quine had pointed out repeatedly in his decades-long dialogue with Carnap, any theorist's description of the constitutive rules of the language would either depend substantially on the theorist's own antecedent sense of the "meanings" of its terms in use or, if the theorist (as in the radical translation situation) were debarred from assuming this sense, would remain substantially underdetermined by the facts of use themselves.

If what we intuitively understand as meaning is indeed in *some* sense determined by our regular usage of terms and expressions in a language, why should it thus be impossible, as Quine asserts, for the theoretician to uniquely capture this usage with a systematic description of underlying rules or regularities explanatory of the meaning of its terms? In its most general form, the answer to this question lies in the existence of a general and profound aporia concerning the explicit description of language that Quine was not the first to discover, but

upon which his indeterminacy result, like many of the most significant negative results of the analytic tradition's investigation of language and meaning, essentially relies.⁹ In the specific terms of Quine's analysis, the problem, in its general form, might be put as follows. Any systematic description of the "rules of use" thought to characterize the actual facts of the usage of a language – the actual ways in which its practitioners combine terms and expressions and move between them – will always, necessarily, be at some distance from the lived reality of use itself. That is, the theoretician's reconstruction of the rules for any actual language always involves some degree of abstraction from the totality of the actual facts concerning the utterance of particular locutions and expressions on particular occasions (past, present, and future). In determining the rules, the theoretician must therefore always make some non-trivial set of reconstructive assumptions, essentially ungrounded in the facts themselves, in order to arrive at a particular description of the (supposedly actual and underlying) rules. And as Quine's result shows, for any such description, there will always be other, inconsistent ones that are equally consistent with the totality of facts of the actual practice of the language. There is thus an essential and ineliminable gap between *any* systematic description of the "structure of language" in terms of rules and the actuality of its practice, what we may think of as the ordinary life of language in its concrete, intersubjective use. Put this way, the aporia does not concern *only* the prospects for producing translations of actually existing languages into one another, or even for the kind of analysis of meaning that Carnap thought his conception of the formation and transformation rules of such languages could offer. Rather, in reaching the indeterminacy result, Quine discerned the existence of a necessary and ineliminable gap between the lived actuality of *any* language – what we intuitively grasp from within as the meaning of its terms—and anything that we might describe as its constitutive underlying structure. This gap cannot, as Quine also realized, be crossed by any description, no matter how complete, of the facts about the use of a language, as long as these facts are described in neutral terms and without pre-judging the question of meaning.¹⁰ Even more seriously, the indeterminacy result manifests a deep and pervasive problem for any systematic attempt to gain theoretical access to "language" itself. For as long as the regularities of a language's practice are conceived as consisting in, or based upon, a system of rules (but how else are they to be conceived?), Quine's problem of indeterminacy will vex any attempt to give these rules a single, unique description. Both for the theoretician who analyzes language's structure and the

ordinary speaker who, in the most everyday instances of linguistic self-reflection, makes reference to the constitutive rules of language and its familiar regularities, the appeal involved in this reference is shown to be elusive, enigmatic, and essentially paradoxical. “Language” emerges as an object which, if it exists at all, can no longer be understood in its origin, structure, or constitution, as a matter of the regular employment of signs by its rule-bound users.

The broader implications of Quine’s result, and the problem it manifests for the question of the “natural” or “cultural” status of language, are perhaps clearest with respect to what it tends to show about the *origin* of language and meaning. The general problem that Quine demonstrates proves fatal, of course, for Carnap’s *conventionalism* about language, for it shows the untenability of the picture that it presupposes, according to which the conventional *institution* of language consists in an essentially free stipulation of rules for the use of signs.¹¹ Were it not for the aporia that Quine demonstrates, we might happily admit the usefulness of Carnap’s fiction of the origin of meaning, even if we did not take it as an accurate description of any historical fact; like the useful fiction of a social contract itself, we might take it as a helpful summary of the constitutive *structure* of the phenomena, even if not a literal description of the historical truth. But the aporia at the center of Quine’s result demonstrates that the conventionalist picture of the institution is not tenable, even as a reconstructive fiction, for it shows that the picture is grounded in an untenable picture of the nature of language itself. For if, as Quine’s result demonstrates, any useful *statement* of the rules constitutive of meaning demands that the theorist interpret those rules in some already existing language, it is incoherent to suppose, as Carnap does suppose, that they might simply be freely stipulated without the meanings of the terms thus fixed being presupposed. The conventionalist account of the institution of language, and its basis in describable facts of conventional agreement or shared practice within a speech community, thus yields to a paradox of origin which we must, following Quine, consider to arise for any account of the conventional *institution* or *stipulation* of the structure of language. For, according to the result, any such institution or stipulation must already presuppose the use of terms with meaning, and so cannot explain it.

The anti-conventionalist moral of Quine’s result may at first seem to suggest the possibility of an alternative *naturalist* picture of the origin and structure of language. Failing to portray this structure as grounded in conventional agreements or stipulations, we might easily

be tempted to reason that it must, instead, be grounded in naturalistically describable facts of behavior, neurobiology, or evolutionary history. But despite Quine's own adoption of the language of behaviorism and his enthusiasm for naturalism in the restricted domain of *epistemology*, the aporia underlying the radical translation result actually bears just as deeply against a naturalistic picture of the structure of language as it does against Carnap's conventionalist picture. For the source of Quine's result is not simply naturalism, but rather the gap that exists between any description of the structure of language and the totality of the facts of its actual use, *however* these are described; and the aporia remains the same whether these facts are conceived as instituted *or* traditional, as conventional *or* natural. Its point is that the theorist's reconstruction of what he portrays as the constitutive rules for the language essentially outruns the totality of *all* the facts, natural *or* conventional, that can be described from a position that does not presuppose the very semantic phenomena of meaning that are to be explained; and this essential gap between the totality of the facts and these phenomena remains, no matter how the facts in question are characterized.

Indeed, as Quine emphasizes at several places in explicit commentary on his own result, where indeterminacy threatens the uniqueness of a description of the structure of a language, naturalistic investigations into the neurophysiology of the language's speakers or the actual biology of their causal mechanisms of language production, can essentially provide no further help.¹² For any theorist's adumbration of the biological, causal, or natural facts supposed to be responsible for the actual production of meaningful utterances *itself* simply amounts to a (partial or complete) translation manual for the interpretation of these utterances, and is open to the same indeterminacy as any such manual. Thus, even given a complete inventory of the "natural" facts, it remains possible for the translator, in giving interpretations of the underlying structure responsible for the meanings that he takes the native terms to have, to give arbitrarily many correct but incompatible translations of the language under consideration. The underlying reason for indeterminacy is not, then, any relative advantage of naturalist or conventionalist characterizations of the underlying facts or foundations of language use; it is, rather, the paradoxical and original gap that Quine's result allows us to see between the totality of the facts characteristic of a language as described from outside and what we can see, from the inside, as the actual and regular meanings of its terms. This gap remains present wherever and whenever positive theory attempts to characterize the systematic structure of language itself;

its existence bears witness to the failure of any totality of neutrally described facts to ground what we, as speakers, experience every day as the meaning of language in our constantly renewed recourse to it.

II.

As we have seen, then, understanding the real semantic origins of Quine's critique of Carnap can allow us to identify the problem underlying this critique as the deep and general one that is involved in any attempt to describe the systematic structure of a language in terms of a corpus of determinate rules conceived as responsible for its actual use. It is substantially the same problem that Wittgenstein poses when, early in the *Philosophical Investigations*, he asks:

What do I call 'the rule by which he proceeds'? -- The hypothesis that satisfactorily describes his use of words, which we observe; or the rule which he looks up when he uses signs; or the one which he gives us in reply if we ask him what his rule is? – But what if observation does not enable us to see any clear rule, and the question brings none to light? ... So how am I to determine the rule according to which he is playing? He does not know it himself.—Or, to ask a better question: What meaning is the expression 'the rule by which he proceeds' supposed to have left to it here?¹³

The passage inaugurates the internally complex and much-contested set of interrelated reflections on language, meaning, and structure, central to the *Investigations*, that have long been characterized as the “rule-following considerations.” As is clear from the paragraph immediately preceding this one, Wittgenstein's abiding concern in the *Investigations* with the question of rules and what is involved in following them stems directly from his desire to clarify “what may lead us (and did lead me) to think that if anyone utters a sentence and *means* or *understands* it he is operating a calculus according to definite rules” (PI 81). The picture that Wittgenstein here describes as his own earlier conception of language in the *Tractatus*, is itself, of course, deeply parallel to Carnap's syntactical conception of languages as calculi determined by the conventional rules for the use of their signs. And Wittgenstein's complex critical response to it depends crucially on his recognition of the very same aporia of language and

application that Quine also discovered and employed critically against Carnap's picture and the conception of meaning and analysis that it supported.

The rule-following considerations famously culminate in what Wittgenstein describes, at *PI* 201, as a paradox of rules and their interpretation: the paradox is, as he puts it, that "no course of action could be determined by a rule, because any course of action can be made out to accord with the rule." As for Quine, the central problem here arises from the essential gap between rules and their application that arises inevitably as soon as we understand language itself as a rule-bound calculus of signs. For any symbolic formulation of a rule of use that we may cite as capturing *the* rule underlying a subject's usage of a specific term is still open to various interpretations in practice; no symbolic formulation by itself determines its own interpretation all by itself and outside a broader and more complex surrounding of practice. The paradox of *PI* 201 is that by demonstrating the necessary failure of theoretical reflection to deliver a unified, comprehensive and explanatory account of the everyday use of language in terms of a corpus or system of rules, it simultaneously poses a twofold aporia of origin that we can subsequently recognize at the center of our ordinary understanding of language, as this understanding figures in the varied occasions of an ordinary life. As we saw in connection with Quine's criticism of Carnap, the paradox makes it impossible to envision the historical origin of language as consisting in the explicit or even implicit *institution* of a determinate set of rules. Yet at the same time, we equally cannot, appreciating the paradox, see what we grasp from the inside as our ordinary use of language as adequately explained even by the *totality* of natural facts about our biology, psychology, environment, or constitution. For any such description in terms of the facts and rules of our actual composition, as Wittgenstein puts it, still leaves open how these facts and rules are applied in practice. Therefore, neither conventionalism nor naturalism offers to clarify the essence of language, as we take it up in everyday reflection and use; or rather, any such clarification in terms of conventional rules or natural facts still fails adequately to determine the lived significance of this use. Here, the question is not only one of the historical or temporal *origin* of language, but also, and equally, of the incapacity of theoretical reflection to bridge the necessary and pervasive gap, encountered again and again in the course of immanent reflection on the shape of language, between what we may conceive as the structure of language itself and the application of this structure in everyday *praxis*.

Reflection on the implications of this paradox yields not only Wittgenstein's far-reaching critique of the structuralist picture of language, but also his deep critical engagement with the psychological, mentalistic, or metaphysical forms of explanation to which, as he saw, the structuralist picture of language may directly tempt us. In particular, as Wittgenstein saw, the structuralist picture of language as a regular calculus of signs is itself deeply linked with the mystified picture of human life that presents thinking, meaning, and understanding as the mysterious and occult accomplishments of a human subject of thought. In 1933 or 1934, at the beginning of the notes that were later published as the *Blue Book*, Wittgenstein applied this critique to the sources and motivations of the picture of sense that had been suggested by his own great philosophical progenitor, Frege:

We are tempted to think that the action of language consists of two parts: an inorganic part, the handling of signs, and an organic part, which we may call understanding those signs, meaning them, interpreting them, thinking. These latter activities seem to take place in a queer kind of medium, the mind; and the mechanism of the mind, the nature of which, it seems, we don't quite understand, can bring about effects which no material mechanism could . . .

Frege ridiculed the formalist conception of mathematics by saying that the formalists confused the unimportant thing, the sign, with the important, the meaning. Surely, one wishes to say, mathematics does not treat of dashes on a bit of paper. Frege's idea could be expressed thus: the propositions of mathematics, if they were just complexes of dashes, would be dead and utterly uninteresting, whereas they obviously have a kind of life. And the same, of course, could be said of any proposition: Without a sense, or without the thought, a proposition would be an utterly dead and trivial thing. And further it seems clear that no adding of inorganic signs can make the proposition live. And the conclusion which one draws from this is that what must be added to the dead signs in order to make a live proposition is something immaterial, with properties different from all mere signs.

But if we had to name anything which is the life of the sign, we should have to say that it was its *use*.¹⁴

Wittgenstein's consideration of the relationship between thinking and language here inherits, and radicalizes, the earlier critique pursued vigorously by analytic philosophers (beginning with Frege himself) of *psychologism* about logic, the view that the laws and results of logic are wholly determined by the psychological processes of a thinking subject. Interestingly, Wittgenstein here connects the deep sources of a psychologistic picture of meaning (one that pictures it as grounded in the "queer" and mysterious mechanisms of the mind) with Frege's own explicitly anti-psychologistic and Platonist conception of meaning and sense. According to Frege's conception, senses are the objectively existing denizens of a substantial "third realm" wholly separate from either the first realm of objective physical events and the second realm of private, subjective states and processes.¹⁵ But Wittgenstein here sees both the psychologistic conception of the "queer mechanism" of the mind and Frege's own Platonistic picture as responsive to a characteristic anxiety that itself results from the structuralist picture of language itself. The anxiety is one of the death of sense or meaning in the materiality of the sign and the mechanicity of its rule-governed repetition. The most characteristic philosophical response to it is, in both cases, the metaphorical invocation of a principle of life, drawn from outside the total economy of the structuralist picture of signs, to re-animate the otherwise dead signs with the possibility of meaning. The characteristic recourse of this invocation is a mystified picture of the life of the human speaker of language in its ordinary capacity to think, mean, and understand.

In a related passage of the *Big Typescript* composed sometime before 1934, Wittgenstein connects this conception of sense with the metaphysics of life that typically informs ordinary discussions of the sources of meaning, language, and thought:

The proposition, or its sense, is not a kind of breathing organism that has a life of its own, and that carries out various exploits, about which we need to know nothing. As if in a manner of speaking we had breathed a soul into it from our soul – its sense – but now it has its own life – like our child—and all we can do is explore it and more or less understand it ... Sense is not the soul of a proposition. So far as we are interested in it, it must be completely measurable, must disclose itself completely in signs.¹⁶

To the psychologism, or supernaturalism, of meaning that characterizes the everyday life of meaning as dependent upon the sublime achievement of such an obscurely animating infusion of

breath, Wittgenstein here opposes a thoroughgoing and ongoing activity of critical reflection. This reflection, what Wittgenstein also characterizes as “therapy” and as “treatment” of the questions forced upon us by misleading and confused pictures of our lives, indeed insists that use must be “completely measurable,” that there can be no appeal to extra-linguistic or *supernatural* explanations, drawn from outside everyday use itself, for the very possibility of meaning anything by any word. What is at issue can only be, as Wittgenstein puts it elsewhere, the material phenomena of language itself. But at the same time, this restriction of descriptions of use to what is “completely measurable” in ordinary use does not demand a restriction of the relevant phenomena of meaning, in the manner of an earlier positivism or verificationism, to those that satisfy a determinate conception of *conditions* for the possibility of meaning, for instance verifiability in principle through the givenness of sense experience. The requirement that sense disclose itself “completely” in signs simply expresses, rather, the inescapability of a thoroughgoing immanent reflection on sense for the forms of critical reflection that answer to the most pervasive and misleading mischaracterizations of a human life.

In other words, the basis of Wittgenstein’s criticism, here, of a problematic and tempting *supernaturalism* about meaning is neither any form of naturalism nor a reinstated conventionalism. It is, rather, a renewal of the critical *question* about the relationship of language to *praxis* that Wittgenstein places at the center, as we have seen, of his consideration of rules and rule-following. To pose this question, and give it a central position in philosophy’s ongoing critical dialogue with the pictures of human life that it itself ceaselessly proposes to ordinary practice, is to renew an ongoing critical reflection on the implications of the language that we take up for the varied circumstances and practices of an ordinary life. It is to demystify the longstanding metaphysics of sense that is otherwise presupposed and ceaselessly re-inscribed in ordinary linguistic reflection almost from the first moment of language itself.

III.

As I have argued, then, close attention to some of the most significant results of the analytic tradition reveals their common grounding in a typical and recurrent aporia of language and its analysis that in fact occurs repeatedly, whenever the systematic analysis of the structure of linguistic meaning is at issue at all. In the critical thought of the later Wittgenstein, recognition of this aporia yields a far-ranging critique of the metaphysics of meaning that can be

seen to underlie the most ordinary pictures of the inner life of the human subject capable of speaking, communicating, and thinking. According to this metaphysics, the possibility of signs bearing sense is itself the achievement of the essentially hidden and occult processes of the 'inner life' of the mind. But the characteristic picture that presents meaning as the breathing of immaterial sense into the materiality of otherwise inert signs is itself a version of the longstanding metaphysical picture that opposes the materiality of the spoken or written forms of language to the immateriality of meaning or sense as material body is opposed to immaterial soul. And with its analysis and diagnosis of this picture on the ground of the vision of language from which it springs, the analytic tradition can find at least one important point of contact with the broader "continental" critique of metaphysics that has also undertaken, in the twentieth century, to renew the ancient question of the nature of a human life on the basis of a reflective consideration of the forms of structures of language.

This common ground of these parallel analytic and continental critiques of metaphysics has often been obscured by the legacy of mutual incomprehension that continues to exist between representatives of the two traditions. But we can begin to bring out at least one instance of it by considering the central involvement of Martin Heidegger's thought, throughout his career, with the very same problematic of language and life that Wittgenstein and Quine's most significant results also demonstrate. In Heidegger's first masterpiece, *Being and Time*, the "analytic" of the basic existential structures constitutive of Da-sein, or the kind of being that we ourselves are, touches at several important points on the question of the nature of language itself. Early on in that work, Heidegger suggests that a prevailing and ancient yet "ontologically insufficient" interpretation of language or *logos* as an objectively present being has long contributed to the ongoing obscurity and inaccessibility of the overarching question of the meaning of being, which *Being and Time* as a whole attempts to reverse.¹⁷ In the sections of *Being and Time* explicitly devoted to language, or discourse, as essential to the "articulation" which, together with other modes, helps to disclose the significance of a human life, Heidegger programmatically poses this question of the kind of being language itself has:

In the end, philosophical research must for once decide to ask what mode of being belongs to language in general. Is it an innerworldly useful thing at hand or does it have the mode of being of Da-sein or neither of the two? What kind of being does language have, if it can be "dead"? What does it mean ontologically

that a language grows or declines? We possess a linguistics, and the being of beings that it has as its theme is obscure; even the horizon for any investigative question about it is veiled. Is it a matter of chance that initially and for the most part significations are 'worldly,' prefigured beforehand by the significance of the world, that they are indeed often predominantly 'spatial'? Or is this 'fact' existentially and ontologically necessary and why?¹⁸

For Heidegger already in 1927, then, gaining clarity about the underlying question of being would require raising the deep and typically obscure question of the relationship between the forms of language and the life of the being that speaks. Beginning in the 1930s, he undertook, an ever more explicit historical examination of nature of being as it has been determined by the specific concepts of particular stages of the metaphysical tradition; and he came to see the prevalent possibilities of linguistic expression as deeply important to the determination of these historical stages. Thus, the attainment of clarity regarding the meaning and truth of being required a historically based interpretation of the deepest proclivities of metaphysics, as reflected in the changing forms of language available at any given historical time. In the modern era since Descartes, one of the most pervasive of these proclivities, Heidegger began to argue, is the conception of the human being as a self-conscious *subject* of experience set off against a world of *objects*. Within the regime of the modern metaphysics of subjectivity, beings in general are conceived as objectively present objects of possible representation within the lived experience of such a subject. Both thinking and descriptive language are conceived as mere species of representation, and truth is understood as consisting in the adequate correspondence of representational propositions to represented facts.

This modern regime is itself, according to Heidegger, simply the latest and most complete form of the characteristic diremption of metaphysics, which consists at each stage in the interpretation of being as consisting in one or another kind of objectively present item or entity, and so hides even the possibility of raising the essential question of the truth of being. This standing and pervasive substitution of individual beings for being itself, as Heidegger began to see in the early 1930s, is deeply linked to the inherent tendencies of ordinary and everyday forms of language to substitute names and references to everyday beings for a deeper level of insight into the truth of being itself. In the complex and mysterious *Beiträge zur Philosophie: vom Ereignis* of the mid-1930s, Heidegger puts the connection this way:

The truth of being cannot be said with the ordinary language that today is ever more widely misused and destroyed by incessant talking. Can this truth ever be said directly, if all language is still the language of beings? Or can a new language for being be invented? No.¹⁹

In other words, as long as language itself remains the language of beings – as long as the essential work of language itself is conceived as the representation of objects in the lived experience of self-conscious subjects of experience – the truth of being will remain veiled within an essential and pervasive obscurity. This recognition led Heidegger, during the 1930s, to begin to envision an alternative experience of language, one in which words do not any longer function merely as representatives or descriptions of objects, but rather as the potential site of a “saying” that directly reveals something of the truth of being itself. He found clues to the possibility of this *revealing* saying in the poetry of Hölderlin, George Trakl and Stefan George. In an essay from 1957 devoted to George’s poem “The Word,” Heidegger treats the poem as bringing to language a unique experience with language, one in which language begins to “speak itself as language” and reveal something of its true character, which is ordinarily everywhere obscured, within the metaphysical tradition, by naming and representing. The basis for this possibility of the revelation of the nature of language—what Heidegger calls elsewhere “bringing language as language to language”—is, paradoxically, the *failure* of language to express itself own character directly:

There is some evidence that the essential nature of language flatly refuses to express itself in words – in the language, that is, in which we make statements about language. If language everywhere withholds its nature in this sense, then such withholding is in the very nature of language. Thus language not only holds back when we speak it in the accustomed ways, but this its holding back is determined by the fact that language holds back its own origin and so denies its being to our usual notions.²⁰

It is, in other words, in the sudden sense of language’s own failure to express what we intend that the character of language itself can first potentially be experienced. This failure is particularly revealing when what is at issue is the character of language itself; here, the necessary absence of a metalinguistic description of language as a whole gives rise to the possibility of an altered experience of its own essential possibility of saying. In this experience,

the failure of representational description adequately to present the character of language witnesses the essential “holding back” of which Heidegger speaks, a necessary reserve of language itself that also witnesses its withdrawal from the possibility of analysis by way of a positive description of its nature and origin.

The transformative experience in which language begins to reveal itself through the essential failure of its own self-description also suggests a radical critique of the metaphysics of sound and sense that is, Heidegger suggests, at the essential root of metaphysics itself. In the 1959 essay “The Way to Language,” Heidegger quotes Wilhelm von Humboldt’s description of the essential work of language as the recurrent material labor of the spirit in its historical quest for self-expression.²¹ Von Humboldt’s description of the nature of language makes its material or audible form the articulation of the essentially spiritual and immaterial activity of thought; like the metaphysical picture that Wittgenstein detects as still present in Frege’s own thinking, it opposes the thinking spirit to the written or spoken word as spirit is opposed to matter, as life is opposed to death. The historical progress of language, indeed history itself, is the ever-renewed struggle for the unity of spirit and matter in the “living word.” Behind this description of language, Heidegger suggests, lies the metaphysics of subjectivity that has long both constructed and modulated the essential distinction between matter and spirit, finally (in absolute idealism) conceiving of the absolute identity of the two as the absolute result of the subject’s own mediated process of self-identification.

But behind this metaphysics of subjectivity, which presents language as the symbolic representation of objects in the self-consciousness of a subject of experience, again lies the ancient determination of language as *logos* and of man as the *zoon logon echon*, the “animal having language.” In a passage near the end of the *Beiträge*, Heidegger describes the priority of this definition throughout the entire history of metaphysics:

Along with the assertion-character of language ... language is known as property and tool of man and at the same time as ‘work.’ But this interconnection of language to man counts as something so profound that even the basic determinations of man himself (again as *animal rationale*) are selected in order to characterize language. What is ownmost to man, in terms of body-soul-spirit, is found again in language: the body (word) of language, the soul of language (attunement and shade of feeling and the like) and the spirit of language (what is

thought and represented) are familiar determinations of all philosophies of language. This interpretation of language, which one could call anthropological interpretation, culminates in seeing in language itself a symbol for human being. If the question-worthiness of the idea of symbols (a genuine offspring of the perplexity toward being that reigns in metaphysics) is here set aside, then man would have to be grasped as that being that has what is his ownmost in his own symbol, i.e., in the possession of this symbol (*logon echon*).²²

The ancient metaphysics that defines the human being as the *zoon logon echon* presents the life of this being, animal in itself, as essentially determined by its possession of or capacity for language, and thereby by its capacity for the labor of the progressive manifestation of supersensible meaning in the sensible forms of writing and speech. But the metaphysics that presents language simply as the possession, tool, or capacity of the living human subject fails along with the essential failure of analytic reflection to describe language itself. Here, the essential paradox of origin that renders the overall structure of language inaccessible to total description also opens the space for a profound reconsideration of this ancient definition of the human being and the relation between language and life that it purports to name. The ancient picture that presents language as the obscure possession of an animal life otherwise exterior to it culminates, as critical thought can now begin to recognize, in the metaphysical picture of the inner life of the subject as defined by its capacity for representation, a picture that presents the material forms of language as wholly under the control of the subject's sublime powers of immaterial thought. With its demonstration of the original paradox of language, structure, and origin, critical thought bears witness to the ultimate failure of this picture, and of the conception of the distinctive forms and possibilities of a human life that it continues to pre-determine.

IV.

Historically speaking, the presumptive naturalism that characterizes much of analytic philosophy today arises largely from the anti-foundationalist moral that contemporary philosophers continue to draw from the decisive results of thinkers such as Quine and Wittgenstein, a moral that those thinkers themselves first drew in their reaction to the earlier analytic projects that aimed to produce a justificatory epistemology within the broader attempt

to give a comprehensive analysis of language and meaning. One way of taking the moral is to conclude, as contemporary naturalists often do, that there is no distinctive source of philosophical knowledge, and hence no possibility of a justificatory story, deeper or more primary than the one suggested by the natural sciences. But as we have seen, to take the anti-foundationalist moral of the analytic tradition's protracted reflective encounter with the forms of the language that we speak to consist *simply* in this limitation of positive philosophical knowledge to what is empirically respectable is to risk an artificially and severely restricted understanding of its real basis and implications. Within this restricted understanding, it becomes more difficult to see the open questions this encounter has suggested about our everyday relationship to the language we speak.

This risk is perhaps most evident in those contemporary projects that aim to "naturalize" language, meaning, or 'intentionality' by describing these phenomena in terms seen as acceptable to what is conceived as a natural-scientific understanding of the world, for instance by presenting the meaning of a sign as a species of causal co-variance or by accounting for it in terms of a (suitably naturalized and non-teleological) sense of biological or adaptive purposes.²³ These attempts to reduce the possibility of meaning wholly to notions couched within a naturalistically respectable vocabulary show, at least so far, little promise of succeeding. In order to give even a remotely plausible description in naturalistic terms of the target phenomena of meaning and intentionality, they must first reduce the complexity and variety of these phenomena so much that the phenomena themselves become largely unrecognizable. Additionally, in attempting to describe the phenomena of linguistic meaning in terms of nature conceived wholly as a realm of *causal* relations, these projects face an extreme difficulty in explaining how the contents of language and thought can stand in *rational* relation to one another, including (but not limited to) the justificatory relations that allow the contents expressible by language to act as reasons for each other and for actions.

Much more promising, at least at first glance, is John McDowell's recent attempt to resolve deep and recurrent tensions in our understanding of the capacity of thought to bear upon the world by proposing an altered conception of the "natural" itself.²⁴ McDowell's starting point is the difficulty that recent analytic thought has faced in accounting for the ability of our perceptual experience to yield genuinely rational constraints on what we can and should think. Since our perceptual experience is normally conceived simply as a matter of what Kant

called receptivity, or merely causal responsiveness to the environment, it seems initially mysterious how its deliverances are to be construed as yielding actual reasons for belief. Help in resolving the problem, McDowell suggests, is to be found only in a revised conception of experience as capable of drawing on the very same conceptual capacities that are responsible for the spontaneity of thought, and so as already open to the rational linkages that characterize contents in what McDowell calls “the logical space of reasons.” As McDowell notes, however, this revised conception of experience remains inaccessible within a conception of perceptual experience that conceives it simply as a causal response to various environmental stimuli. Instead, he suggests, an answer is to be found by reconceiving the shape of our ordinary perceptual openness to the world as already involving openness to contents capable of serving not only as causes but as reasons as well.

Drawing on Aristotle’s ethics, McDowell suggests that we can account for this perceptual openness to a rationally organized sense of the world by reinstating a “naturalism of second nature” that presents responsiveness to reasons as the outcome of a natural, although specifically human, process of normal maturation. We can then, McDowell suggests, describe this process as transforming us into thinkers, fully at home in the space of reasons:

Thought can bear on empirical reality only because to be a thinker at all is to be at home in the space of reasons ... Now it is not even clearly intelligible to suppose a creature might be born at home in the space of reasons. Human beings are not: they are born mere animals, and they are transformed into thinkers and intentional agents in the course of coming to maturity. This transformation risks looking mysterious. But we can take it in our stride if, in our conception of the *Bildung* that is a central element in the normal maturation of human beings, we give pride of place to the learning of language. In being initiated into a language, a human being is introduced into something that already embodies putatively rational linkages between concepts, putatively constitutive of the layout of the space of reasons, before she comes on the scene. This is a picture of initiation into the space of reasons as an already going concern; there is no problem about how something describable in those terms could emancipate a human individual from a merely animal mode of living into being a full-fledged subject, open to the world.²⁵

If we can understand what is involved in our normal human maturation in these terms, McDowell suggests, the problem of the bearing of experience on rational thought then gains a broadly naturalistic solution. For assuming that we can expand our conception of the natural to include what we can see as involved in the actualization of capacities natural to us as a species, we can present this bearing as involving nothing beyond what is natural, at least on the expanded conception. The key to this expanded conception of the natural is, as McDowell puts it, a reinstatement of Aristotle's definition of the human as the rational animal, or as that kind of animal whose normal kind of life specifically involves a capacity for reason. For this kind of animal, it is natural to gain access to a space of reasons that is "there anyway," independent of what any individual thinks of it, containing rational relations between concepts whose structure amounts to a "going concern" that nevertheless always stands open to further revision, reflection and criticism. The key to the natural accessibility of this space to the kind of beings that we are is our possibility, which we may see as part of part of our own natural way of life, of learning and becoming inducted into a first language, and so coming into the world that it makes accessible to us.

McDowell is certainly right to see the problem of the form of our access to the world as deeply interrelated with the question of our relationship to the language that we speak. And his suggestion that, in order to resolve the tensions of recent thought, we may have to reconceive what we mean by "naturalism" is also laudable, in that it shows a clear recognition of the extreme depth and difficulty of the problems in this region, which straightforward attempts to naturalize language and meaning most often simply ignore. On the other hand, as we are now in a position to see, McDowell's attempt to render these problems innocuous simply by reference to the learning of a language, and so to account for our openness to reasons in broadly "naturalistic" terms, must be considered futile. For it amounts to presenting as unproblematic exactly what emerges, from a broader reading of the history of twentieth century philosophy's engagement with the question of language, as the source of its deepest and still most unresolved problems: namely, our everyday access to the language that we speak.

It is, of course, possible to describe the attainment of this access as part of a "normal" human upbringing, and we can even gain some (limited) understanding of what is involved in it by understanding clearly what specific physical, biological, or cognitive-scientific traits or

characteristics must be in place for this attainment to be so much as possible. But as we have seen, the central and irreducible problem of the form and structure of language, in relation to the application that activates it ceaselessly in practice, remains unresolved by any totality, no matter how complete, of descriptions of the specific facts, circumstances, and capacities of the human animal. For even the totality of such descriptions leaves open the question of the application of language in the everyday moments of what we can see as a human life. This question is implied in every attempt to describe the original structure of language or our access to it; it is renewed, in practice, at each moment of instruction or induction into a language, each fragile moment of education at which our descriptions of what we take to be the regularities of our lives grip, or fail to grip, the child or student whom we would, by means of them, bring into our world. To attempt, as McDowell does, to resolve the question of our access to reasons by means of reference to the (“natural”) endowments of a species endowed with language, is then to replace one mystery with another. It is once again to obscure, under the veneer of a superficially plausible “naturalism,” some of the most interesting and pressing problems with which our contemporary self-understanding presents us in its consideration of the language that we speak.

In holding that a simple reinstatement of Aristotle’s definition of the human as the rational animal can resolve the problem of the relationship of language to life, McDowell largely misses what we could otherwise come to see as the deeper positive implications of that problem for the contemporary possibilities of critical thought about the determinate forms of our ordinary lives and practices. Conceiving of initiation into the space of reasons as consisting simply in initiation into a language, McDowell also emphasizes that a language is, on his conception, the “embodiment” of a determinate historical tradition. As such, it already both includes a determinate sense of the layout of the space of reasons—what McDowell calls a “store of historically accumulated wisdom about what is a reason for what.”²⁶ What he treats as the “second”-natural openness to reason of animals built the way we are is also, then, our openness to specific historically and culturally constituted structures of goals and purposes. Becoming initiated into these structures might, as McDowell suggests, also put us in a position to reflect critically on their determinate layout, for instance to criticize the specific layout of some of the reasons our own culture offers for the pursuit or utility of a specific social practice for some already accepted purpose.

But what is missing from the critical register of McDowell's thought in this region is the possibility of a more radical consideration of what is involved in being motivated by reasons that we can cite in symbolic form at all. This additional level of critical consideration can emerge, on the other hand, if we take seriously the central paradox of structure and origin that repeatedly arises in the history of the twentieth century's reflection on the structure of language. For as we saw, especially in connection with Wittgenstein, to raise this paradox is to raise the question of the very ground of the possibility of what we understand as our application of linguistic reason itself, in relation to what we may see as the "practices" that make up our everyday lives. This consideration demands, as well, that we take up anew the still unresolved question of the figuring of language, and the reason that we may seem it as embodying, within what Wittgenstein calls our "complicated form of life."²⁷ By relying on the Aristotelian definition of the human as the animal possessing language, McDowell's "naturalism of second nature" misses the possibility of this deeper level of critical thought grounded in a far ranging reconsideration of what we, ourselves, are. It misses the possibility of a life that takes up the constantly aporetic image of language as we meet with it in the varied occasions of ordinary practice and action, constantly renewing the radical question of meaning at its center, and so capable of rediscovering, beyond metaphysics, the freedoms that such consideration recurrently opens.

V.

I have argued that the prevailing naturalistic style in analytic philosophy, whatever its recommendations, is itself the historical outcome of a problematically decisive twentieth-century encounter with the forms and structures of language in their relation to a human life. This encounter is central for the historical development of the analytic tradition, but its deeper critical implications are nevertheless in danger of being almost entirely lost to that tradition in its contemporary practice. The results of Quine, Wittgenstein, and others within the tradition discern an essential and constitutive paradox of origin and practice within the constantly renewed claim of language on an ordinary human life. The paradox itself reveals language, as we can encounter it both in theoretical and everyday reflection, as being, in an important sense, neither natural nor cultural; it is comprehensible neither in terms of a naturalistic account of the endowments and capacities we ourselves are, nor in terms of the essentially free instituting

acts of agents already endowed with rationality. Rather than characterize language as either natural or cultural, then, understanding the constitutive paradox at the center of the image of language, as it appears in both ordinary and theoretical reflection, suggests instead, as I have argued, that we take up anew the question of the claim of language on a human life, as this question intersects with the ancient question of the linguistic determination of our nature itself. And rather than determining this nature, along the lines of the ancient Aristotelian definition, simply in terms of the natural capacities and abilities of an animal entitled to possess language, the paradox demands that we take up anew the question of the being of language itself in relation to the everyday linguistic acts and occasions of an ordinary human life. This critical reflection offers new terms for interrogating the figures of rational motivation, and recourse to the structure and force of reasons, which regularly operate within such a life, both in the motivation of action and in the production of mutual intelligibility. It offers to demystify the ancient metaphysics of sound and sense that presents language as the sublime accomplishment of an obscurely animating spirit with a renewed and wholly immanent reflection on the meaning of language for our lives as we encounter its image incessantly in the forms of everyday reflection and engagement that ceaselessly invoke it.

Contemporary forms of naturalism, presupposing and promoting their claim for the comprehensiveness of explanation, respond to the supernaturalism of this metaphysics by lodging the life of language wholly within what they conceive as the materiality of its practice. And yet, as Wittgenstein pointed out, the paradox of origin also renders any exclusively naturalistic or conventionalist explanation of language inadequate for its explanatory purpose. The paradox thus demands that, beyond or in addition to seeing language *simply* as a material, physical, biological or psychological process among others that make up a human life, we also recognize its deeply ambiguous and still fundamentally unclear relationship to anything that we can see as such a life at all. To take up this ambiguity, and recognize it as such, is itself to combat the mystifying conception that still regularly dissimulates the problems of language in the form of a presumptive yet obscure accounting, either in naturalist or supernaturalist terms, for the occult acts and accomplishments of a rational subject of thought conceived as autonomous in itself. It is to recognize in the constantly renewed invocation of language the everyday rhythm of an incessantly renewed appeal that sustains the meaningfulness of our pursuits by recurrently appealing to the question of our nature, outside any possible assurance

of gaining a determinate answer to it; we may then recognize the aspiration of this rhythm, as we take up the question of language again and again in the words which pose, and so create, the forms of our own experience, as the breath of our lives itself.

¹ Papineau 1993.

² I document many of these historical instances in more detail in Livingston (2008).

³ Quine 1969. The essay was first presented, as an address, at the Fourteenth International Congress of Philosophy in Vienna on September 9, 1968.

⁴ Quine 1969, 82-83.

⁵ Carnap 1934.

⁶ For a more detailed examination of the role of this principle – what I have called Quine’s *appeal to use* – in his writings beginning in 1934 and leading to the indeterminacy result, see Livingston (2008), chapter 5.

⁷ There are those who find it soothing to say that the analytic statements of the second class [viz. those that are not “logical” truths] reduce to those of the first class, the logical truths, by definition; “bachelor,” for example, is defined as “unmarried man.” But how do we find that “bachelor” is defined as “unmarried man”? Who defined it thus, and when? Are we to appeal to the nearest dictionary, and accept the lexicographer’s formulation as law? Clearly this would be to put the cart before the horse. The lexicographer is an empirical scientist, whose business is the recording of antecedent facts; and if he glosses “bachelor” as “unmarried man” it is because of his belief that there is a relation of synonymy between those forms, implicit in general or preferred usage prior to his own work. (Quine 1950, 24).

⁸ Quine 1960, 27.

⁹ I have discussed the arising and implications of this aporia, in the texts of twentieth-century analytic philosophy, in greater detail in Livingston (2008), especially chapters 1, 5, 8, and 9.

¹⁰ As has been noted by commentators, the indeterminacy result has an air of extreme implausibility. For taken one way, it seems to imply that the vast majority of sentences that we use every day in ordinary language have no determinate meaning. There is no fact of the matter, accessible to neutral investigation, about the actual meaning of even such simple and apparently innocent sentences as “there is a rabbit,” for as Quine showed, the facts do not determine a unique translation of that sentence, and indeed of

almost any everyday sentence, into any other language. There is, in other words, no justification to be found in the facts (even if *all* the facts are taken into consideration) for our ordinary assumption that we can mean something quite specific by our ordinary everyday locutions, and our ordinary expectation that our meanings can readily be understood by others whom we identify as speaking our own language.

Quine himself, in a later chapter of *Word and Object*, took this result to suggest the elimination, at least for scientific purposes, of our ordinary talk of meanings and intensions. Short of such an eliminativist solution, however, we can remedy the situation at least partially, however, by noting that Quine's indeterminacy result by itself actually need not be construed as posing any deep threat to the intuitive and pre-theoretical everyday sense of shared meaning that in fact characterizes everyday interlocution between speakers of a shared language. The threat is, rather, to the possibility of *grounding* this sense, by means of a neutral description of the rules of usage constitutive of the language, in the totality of facts of usage themselves. But the thought that our sense of meaning *should* be able to be so grounded is, itself simply a direct outcome of the structuralist picture of languages as systematic calculi of rules of use, the same picture that Carnap had proposed in *Logical Syntax*. For more discussion of these issues, see Livingston (2008), chapter 5.

¹¹ Along with, perhaps, stipulations of the referents of names.

¹² As Quine put it in 1986, for instance, "even a full understanding of neurology would in no way resolve the indeterminacy of translation." (Quine 1986, 365). See also Quine (1979), where he makes a similar point.

¹³ *PI* 82.

¹⁴ Wittgenstein 1934, 3-4.

¹⁵ See, e.g., Frege 1918.

¹⁶ Wittgenstein 1933, 210.

¹⁷ Heidegger 1927, 160.

¹⁸ Heidegger 1927, 166.

¹⁹ Heidegger 1938, 54.

²⁰ Heidegger 1957, 81.

²¹ Heidegger 1959.

²² Heidegger 1938, 353-54.

²³ For some attempts, see, e.g., Millikan (1984), Papineau (1993), Dretske (1997) and Fodor (1992).

²⁴ McDowell 1994.

²⁵ McDowell 1994, 124-5.

²⁶ McDowell 1994, 126.

²⁷ *PI*, 174.

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