

FULL-BLOODEDNESS, MODESTY AND MINIMALIST TRUTH

Daniel Billinge

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at the
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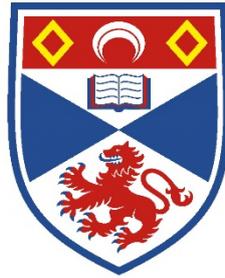
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Full-bloodedness, Modesty and Minimalist Truth

Daniel Billinge



University of
St Andrews

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews

25/9/2015

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To my parents and Diana Cameron

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Abstract

This thesis discusses the central ideas that surround Michael Dummett's claim that there is an incompatibility between a truth-conditional conception of meaning and a minimalist conception of truth. These ideas are brought into relation to the work of John McDowell and Donald Davidson, as all three philosophers can be better understood by locating them within Dummett's dialectic regarding the incompatibility. Dummett's argument crucially depends upon the assumption that a meaning-theory should be full-blooded in nature, against McDowell's insistence that a meaning-theory can only ever be modest. The main contention of this thesis is that neither Dummett nor McDowell are successful in establishing their strong contentions regarding the form that a meaning-theory should take. McDowell only wants to provide trivial answers to questions about the constitutive nature of the meanings and competency of particular items in a language. Dummett, on the other hand, wants to provide a reductive account of the central concepts that concern the philosophy of language. What this thesis will argue is that once both of these claims have been rejected, the position Dummett and McDowell jointly dictate is in fact the position that we should read Davidson as occupying, who lies in a conceptual space between the extremes of maximal full-bloodedness and modesty. This is an understanding of Davidson that is contrary to how McDowell reads him, who has been an influential commentator of Davidson. How Davidson should actually be interpreted is achieved by understanding how he has the resources to avoid Dummett's claim of an incompatibility between a truth-conditional conception of meaning and a minimalist conception of truth.

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Introduction

Michael Dummett, John McDowell and Donald Davidson all rank as hugely influential figures in the philosophy of language, and their work is difficult, and at times torturous, to understand. Part of the difficulty in their work lies in the difficulty of the subject matter, while all three are systematic thinkers, making it challenging to understand any one paper written without having a good understanding of the many others written by that author and their interrelation. Their work has framed much of the discussion in this area of investigation since Davidson's seminal papers of the 1960's and 1970's. Here Davidson introduced the notion of reflecting on the form a "meaning-theory" for a specific language as being the best method for formulating philosophical problems that surround the concept of meaning, the most basic of which is "What is it for our words to mean what they do?". The aim of this thesis is to provide an understanding and critical examination of some of the central aspects of the work of all three philosophers. Since the systematic nature of their work makes it difficult to give any clear linear exposition of it, it is hoped that placing their ideas within a specific dialectical framework will be the most fruitful approach to understanding them.

The framework used in this thesis is centred on Dummett's contention that the truth-conditional conception of meaning is incompatible with a minimalist conception of truth. This incompatibility is predicated on Dummett's commitment to a "full-blooded" meaning-theory, which is one that aims to provide non-trivial explanations regarding the meanings and competency of particular items of a language. Dummett also wants a reductionist explanation of the central concepts that concern the philosophy of language, such as those of meaning, truth, assertion, etc., by defining such concepts in terms of ones that belong to a lower conceptual level. It is because Dummett's preferred meaning-theory aims to achieve

non-triviality and explains truth and meaning together that he claims that a meaning-theory which embodies the truth-conditional conception of meaning is incompatible with a minimalist conception of truth. McDowell, on the other hand, advocates a “modest” meaning-theory, which only provides trivial explanations about the meanings and competency of items in a language and is one that attempts to illuminate the central concepts through a methodological approach that traces the conceptual links between them. By rejecting any commitment to a full-blooded meaning-theory, McDowell denies that there is any issue regarding the compatibility between a truth-conditional conception of meaning and a minimalist conception of truth.

This thesis will argue that neither Dummett nor McDowell are entirely successful in their arguments. Both fall short in their strong contentions regarding the form that a meaning-theory should take and instead show the need for something less than their extremes. Specifically I will reject the non-triviality of McDowell and the reductionism of Dummett. We should seek something more illuminating in the philosophy of language than the descriptive, “quietist” stance of McDowell. However, reductionism of the central concepts is to be avoided as the resultant position will not be able to capture the obvious rationality of language or reconstruct the central concepts. The position Dummett and McDowell jointly dictate is, in fact, the very position that we should read Davidson as occupying. For Davidson has no interest in wanting to reduce the central concepts but neither does he provide trivial explanations regarding the meanings and competency of items in a language. However, by advocating non-triviality, a truth-conditional conception of meaning and having a sympathetic attitude towards a minimalist conception of truth, Davidson has to face Dummett’s claims of an incompatibility regarding these ideas. It is by considering how Davidson has the resources to avoid Dummett’s argument that this thesis will provide a proper understanding of how the concepts of truth and meaning are given body and content on Davidson’s account. This will be an understanding of Davidson that is contrary to how McDowell reads him (and initially Dummett), who sees Davidson as sharing a desire for modesty. I locate where McDowell’s influential reading of Davidson goes wrong, which is in its misunderstanding of Davidson’s holism.

It is hoped that by looking at Dummett’s incompatibility claim it will be fruitful in understanding the work of all three protagonists as it results from differing conceptions

regarding the illumination that the philosophy of language should be achieving. It concerns what our philosophical dispositions should be when we encounter problems in this area of investigation, and the methodology that we adopt as a result will inform much of our thinking to questions concerning the central concepts of meaning, truth, assertion, etc. By understanding the location of each of the three philosophers on the spectrum that runs from “maximal” full-bloodedness through to modesty, we can understand centrally important theses that they hold which have been central to the thinking of philosophers of language since the 1970’s. The incompatibility argument also concerns the relationship between the concepts of truth and meaning which has been of central and fundamental importance to much of the work in this area.

The structure of the thesis is as follows. Since I am suggesting that we should read Davidson as occupying a conceptual space that lies between Dummett and McDowell, we first need to understand the positions of McDowell and then Dummett relative to the dialectic. This is made more tractable by the fact that Dummett and McDowell both directly engage with each other’s work. Indeed, McDowell has contributed three papers to essay collections dedicated to the work of Dummett. These are “In Defence of Modesty” (1987), “Another Plea for Modesty” (1997) and “Dummett on Truth-Conditions and Meaning” (2007). With the first and third papers, Dummett’s replies to McDowell are published in the same collections. It is revealing that in both cases, Dummett’s replies are noticeably longer than his replies to other contributors in the same essay collections. These papers and replies have provided invaluable material to understand and contrast the work of these two philosophers, and will be relied upon throughout the thesis.

Chapter 1 aims to provide some background ideas that both Dummett and McDowell share that will provide some stage setting for their disagreement and contrasting positions. These ideas are the best way to achieve an understanding of the general concept of meaning, and other centrally important ones to the philosophy of language, is to follow Davidson’s lead of looking at the form that a “meaning-theory” for a particular language should take. The aim of a meaning-theory is to specify the meanings of every word and sentence of a particular language and to understand what it is for those items to have the particular meanings they do. Although the theory would be specifying the meanings of items that belong to a *particular* language, reflecting on the overall, general form that a

theory would have to take in order to successfully achieve this task would provide clarification of the *general* concept of meaning. I will follow the dialectic of much of Dummett's work which assumes that the truth-conditional conception of meaning is the default position. Given this non-neutral framework that Dummett's discussion starts with, he makes a tripartite distinction between the "core", the "shell" and the "theory of force" within a meaning-theory. I will adopt this terminology as it is also used by McDowell in his engagement with Dummett. The core of a meaning-theory will consist in a specification of the truth-conditions of indicative sentences of a language from the semantic properties of their parts and the way that they are put together, and giving the truth-conditions of sentences will amount to specifying their meanings. The shell aims to explain what it is for the individual items of the language to have the meanings they do by explaining why the core provides the correct semantics for the language in terms of facts about how those items are used. The theory of force is concerned with the various types of speech-acts that can be effected in the language.

This methodological approach requires a distinction to be drawn between an invariant content of an utterance and its force, a distinction that is, in one way or another, denied by the later Wittgenstein and more recently by Charles Travis. If such a distinction is rejected, then this would look to impinge on the usefulness of the "Davidsonian" methodology of looking at the form of a meaning-theory. I will look at how Dummett responds to Wittgenstein's comments and, more briefly, how McDowell has responded to Travis's. The chapter will finish with how Dummett and McDowell understand the claim that a meaning-theory is a theory of competence, and contrast this with how John Foster reads the identification. Essentially Dummett and McDowell agree that the identification should be read with no-priority, in that a meaning-theory should provide a faithful description of the character of speakers' competency at the same time as specifying facts about the meanings of particular items.

Chapter 2 will then introduce McDowell's "modesty" which will be vitally important in understanding his disagreement with Dummett regarding the compatibility between a meaning-theory that embodies the truth-conditional conception of meaning and a minimalist conception of truth. It is because McDowell thinks a meaning-theory can only ever be modest that he thinks there is no compatibility issue. A modest meaning-theory is a

theory that only provides trivial answers to questions concerning the meanings and competency of particular items of a language. It is also one that adopts a methodology of “conceptual geography” in order to illuminate the central concepts that concern the philosophy of language. Reductionism is to be rejected, and instead McDowell seeks a mapping of the interrelations between the central concepts without depriving himself of a presupposed understanding of them. McDowell attempts to “quieten” any desire for non-trivial, substantive answers when we ask what it is for a particular item to have the meaning it does within the shell of a meaning-theory by reflecting on the obvious correctness of a homophonic meaning-theory. If explaining the correctness of the core is how we answer what it is for items of a language to mean what they do, and the correctness of a homophonic meaning-theory is obvious, then McDowell wants us to conclude with him that questions about in virtue of what items of the language mean what they do should not be given serious attention.

I will argue that McDowell’s appeal to homophonic meaning-theories is illegitimate to establish this conclusion. It is only by assuming that the meta-language is an extension of the object language that we can see the obvious correctness of a homophonic theory. Making that assumption, however, looks to be tantamount to a flat refusal to answer precisely the questions being asked, rather than providing us with independent grounds for why we should not be asking them in the first place. McDowell also lacks the resources to informatively account for the difference between knowing, of a sentence, that it is true and knowing the proposition expressed by a sentence, and has little to say about the capacities of speakers to understand a potentially infinite number of sentences and ones which are novel to them. The conclusion that is reached at the end of the chapter is that McDowell fails to establish his contention that a meaning-theory should be modest by only providing trivial explanations about the meanings of items of a language.

Chapter 3 will then outline Dummett’s demand for a meaning-theory to be “full-blooded”. I do so with an eye towards rejecting his contention, in chapter 5, that a meaning-theory should reduce the central concepts that concern the philosophy of language. For a full-blooded theory is one that provides non-trivial, substantial answers about in virtue of what items of a language mean what they do. A “maximally” full-blooded theory would be one that is also reductionist in nature by not taking it as already understood any semantic or

intentional concepts, but instead defines them in terms of notions that belong to a lower conceptual level. The contrast between modesty and maximal full-bloodedness looks to concern the form that the shell of a meaning-theory should take, but the dispute is not confined there, for the nature of the shell will also impact the theory of force as well. I outline how the theory of force will have to reconstruct the central concepts and derive the content of utterances on Dummett's account. Dummett's argument regarding the incompatibility between the truth-conditional conception of meaning and a minimalist conception of truth is approached in this chapter once an understanding of full-bloodedness is given. The argument is based upon Dummett's contention that truth and meaning should both be explained together within a meaning-theory, and that the theory should aim for non-triviality regarding particular items. The chapter makes a distinction between a minimalist conception of truth and minimalist and redundancy *theories* of truth. Although Dummett thinks *both* minimalist conceptions *and* theories are incompatible with the truth-conditional conception of meaning, it is only the incompatibility with regards to the former conception of truth that is concentrated on in this thesis, as this is the more interesting, and less discussed, issue.

In chapter 4 I attempt to find a "Dummettian" notion of use that would serve to explain in virtue of what items of a language mean what they do in Dummett's account. The chapter begins by outlining Dummett's commitment to a "molecular" account of language as this will be important in chapter 5 in understanding how he thinks the meanings of the vast majority of sentences of a language can be given in non-trivial terms. A molecular account of language states that to understand any sentence of a language, a speaker must have a competency of some fragment of a language to which that sentence belongs. What is meant by a "fragment" of language is in the first instance explained by considering Evans's "generality constraint". Molecularism adds to Evans's ideas the claim that there will be an asymmetric dependency relation between speakers' understanding of sentences. That is, that language is organised into a hierarchy of language fragments based upon their complexity. Wittgenstein's language-game of the builders is then introduced with the intention that it will be useful in delineating three different levels of description. The two extremes of description are the causally induced behaviour of animals in the Skinner box experiments and full-blown language. The language-game of the builders can be seen as occupying a

level of description that falls between these two extremes. The builders are engaged in a normative, rule-governed practice but semantic and intentional notions would not be applicable here as the central concepts that are bound up with rationality are not present.

The builders might be suggestive, then, that there exists a level of description that would meet Dummett's goal of reductionism. For a general, undefended assumption that I make throughout the thesis is that behaviourism and psychologism are both to be avoided, as it forms part of the common ground that is shared by Dummett, McDowell and Davidson. This means that the notion of use that would be used in the shell of a meaning-theory cannot be characterised in behaviouristic terms or in terms of the content of the psychological states of speakers. Dummett does not want to describe use in semantic or intentional terms either in order to achieve the reductionism he desires. However, the builders do not possess reason and the central concepts that concern the philosophy of language are not present in their practice. I propose that such things come in to view, for Dummett, when there are inferential relations in the practice. This leads on to a discussion of Dummett's preferred meaning-theory, a so called "justificationist" theory, which takes as central a notion of use that is connected with the grounds that entitle an assertion to be made. It is at this point that Dummett's assumption that the truth-conditional approach is the default position is rejected, although the reasons for his rejection are put to one side for ease of exposition.

Chapter 5 picks up from this discussion and argues that Dummett's reductionist ambitions cannot be sustained. The problem that Dummett faces is located at the "ground level", which will be the most fundamental fragments of language in the molecular hierarchy. If we were considering, in isolation, fragments of language that lie above those at the ground level, then Dummett *does* have the resources to respond to accusations of not capturing the rationality of language. The structure of the hierarchy and reductionism dictates, however, that the notion of use at the ground level will have to be characterised in terms of the notion of the circumstances of entitlement. This will be a normative, but not a semantic, understanding of the notion of use. The undesirability of Dummett's account is approached by looking at an analogy he makes with why a full-blooded theory of board games must be possible to provide. A theory of, say, chess would explain what it is to play that game by explaining the moves in chess in terms of their significance to prospects of

which end position is achieved. Although Dummett wishes to use this analogy as a way of justifying why reductionism in the philosophy of language should be possible, in fact it shows the opposite. The significance of the moves in chess are entirely internal to the game and to the effects that they have to the prospects of the players. There is no external point to the game which means that the moves do not have the same type of significance that is inherent with linguistic meaning. If Dummett wants to give an account of language in a similar manner by characterising use in terms of the circumstances of entitlements and the difference the moves in language potentially make to what subsequently happens, then it will make language out as being no more than a rule-governed game like chess.

An envisaged response from Dummett is that it is because the notions of knowledge and understanding are ineliminable in his account that it avoids any accusation of not capturing the rationality of language. This response, however, is inadequate, and to see this I move away from an exegesis of Dummett's work and place his ideas into comparison with Wittgenstein's language-game of the builders. In chapter 4 the builders were used to suggest there might exist a level of description that falls between the merely behaviourist, on the one hand, and the semantic and intentional, on the other, that Dummett would require. One aspect of the builders that differentiates them from causally induced behaviour is that they have some form of very basic understanding or awareness in the appropriateness of their behaviour. This would have to be the way that Dummett would characterise the knowledge and understanding that is possessed by speakers of a language at the ground level as well. The only difference between the builders and ourselves at the ground level would be that there is a structure of entitlements in our language that is absent with the builders. It is not because the builder language-game is, conceptually, a totally different practice to the one we are engaged in. Rather the difference would lie in the fact that language would comprise a vast number of builder-type language-games. By placing Dummett's position and response in comparison to the builder language-game, we can see that it is not adequate. The vocabulary that is suitable to describe the behaviour of the builders has to be normative but the central concepts and rationality are not present here. I will argue that Dummett's account of language will view speakers' linguistic behaviour as being no more than a complex form of vocalisation akin to the builders. The addition of taking speakers' understanding and knowledge of their language seriously will not magic the central

concepts into the picture for Dummett, and neither will making language out as comprising a vast number of builder-type language-games. This will conclude the second part of my negative claim that McDowell and Dummett are unable to establish their strong contentions.

The positive proposal of this thesis, given in chapter 6, is that Davidson should be read as occupying a conceptual space between Dummett and McDowell. I begin this claim by outlining Davidson's move away from taking the concept of truth as the *one* central concept upon which the whole explanatory burden fell, towards a more McDowellian attitude of giving content to the central concepts by understanding how they must hang together for rational intelligibility of others to be possible at all. This led to Davidson's reflections of "radical interpretation" becoming more pronounced in his work. The process of radical interpretation is the process of coming to understand speakers of a foreign language from scratch by constructing a meaning-theory for their language. I provide a reading of the conditions and constraints that Davidson imposes upon this process which sees the intentional attitude of "holding-true" as being Davidson's construal of the notion of use. This is a notion of use which prevents Davidson's account from being reductionist, yet he thinks it can be identified before one understands the content of the sentence held-true or of a detailed understanding of the psychological states of speakers. Davidson's holism consists in seeing the holding-true of every sentence as partially constitutive of the meaning and competency of every item of a language. Together, Davidson's construal of the notion of use and his holism provide him with a full-blooded account, contrary to how McDowell reads him. McDowell thinks that Davidson's holism is simply the interconnectedness of the central concepts. Although Davidson does indeed think this, it is clear that his holism is intended to have more bite to it. Instead it relates to how a meaning-theory is tested for its correctness, and testing the correctness of a meaning-theory in terms of facts about use is how we answer the constitutive questions about the meanings and competency of particular items in a language.

The chapter finishes with how Davidson has the resources to avoid Dummett's incompatibility argument. This will provide a reading of how Davidson intends to give the concepts of truth and meaning a more substantial treatment than McDowell offers. I draw a distinction between the expressibility of the notion of truth within a language and its expressibility as from "outside" that language. The minimalist conception of truth relates

truth to assertoric content, and in that sense it is one that concerns its expressibility within a language. For it is essential to understanding how this connection captures the content of the concept of truth that we are able to understand the meanings of sentences of the target language and what they can be used to assert. Although Davidson has considerable sympathies with minimalist conceptions of truth, he avoids saying that this conception of truth appropriately characterises the concept. Instead he thinks it is by using the concept of truth, through the attitude of holding-true, to achieve non-triviality that its content is given. Since this attitude can be identified before one gains an understanding of the content of the sentence or of the psychological states of speakers, it is a conception of truth that is characterised through its role as from “outside” that language. This opens up an explanatory strategy for Davidson in which an account of meaning is given by using the concept of truth (holding-true), but once that account has been given, then giving truth a word within that language can be achieved at the end by citing the minimalist conception of truth that relates truth to assertoric content.

Chapter 1

Background: The Role of Meaning-Theories

1.0. Introduction

The ideas that surround Michael Dummett's claim that the truth-conditional approach to meaning is incompatible with a minimalist conception of truth will be used in this thesis as a framework to understand some of the central themes in his work as well as those of John McDowell and Donald Davidson. These three philosophers have made important contributions to the philosophy of language, and their distinctive ideas in this area can be brought into comparison within that framework. In the first instance this is because Dummett's incompatibility claim is predicated on the issue as to whether a meaning-theory should be "full-blooded" or "modest". Where one takes a stand on this issue is informed by the kind of illumination that is sought to be achieved regarding the central problems that the philosophy of language seeks to clarify. While Dummett advocates full-bloodedness, McDowell favours modesty, and Davidson lies somewhere in-between. The incompatibility argument, and with it the issue of full-bloodedness and modesty, lies, then, centrally within each philosopher's conception of the very goals that the philosophy of language should be setting which then informs the vast majority of their ideas. Light can be shed on each philosopher's work by understanding their orientation to these issues and themes. This is of value because of the huge importance all three have made to this area of investigation which has been the impetus for much of the work in the philosophy of language since the 1970's.

Secondly, McDowell, who has been an influential commentator of Davidson, interprets Davidson as sharing a modest conception of a meaning-theory, and Dummett initially did the same. What I will suggest is that this is an inaccurate interpretation of Davidson. This will be done by arguing that neither Dummett nor McDowell are able to

establish their strong contentions regarding the form that a meaning-theory should take. A demonstration of this claim would be valuable in itself, as it would eliminate two possible ends of the spectrum regarding what our approach should be in the philosophy of language; “quietism”, on the one hand, and reductionism, on the other. It will also be used to point to the position they jointly dictate, which is, in fact, the very position that we should read Davidson as occupying. How we should actually read Davidson will be achieved by locating him within the framework and understanding how he has the resources to avoid Dummett’s incompatibility argument in chapter 6. Since I am suggesting that we should read Davidson as occupying a conceptual space that lies between Dummett and McDowell, we first need to understand the two extremes of the spectrum and their undesirability. Chapter 2 will be concerned with outlining and criticising McDowell’s modesty, while more work is needed for Dummett’s position. Chapter 3 and 4 will mainly be concerned with Dummett exegesis so as to understand the requirement of full-bloodedness and how Dummett aims to achieve it. Chapter 5 will move away from Dummett exegesis and place his ideas in comparison with Wittgenstein’s builder language-game to open up a position from which I can criticise his account. The current chapter will be concerned with providing some general background details regarding meaning-theories that Dummett and McDowell both accept that will need to be understood before going on in the next chapters to detail where their attitudes come apart when I outline their dramatically opposed positions. I will also offer a partial defence of such background ideas in the process.

These general, shared attitudes, outlined in 1.1, are that the best way for achieving an understanding of the general concept of meaning, and other centrally important ones, is by following the “Davidsonian” methodology of looking at the form that a meaning-theory for a particular language should take. The task of a meaning-theory is to specify the meanings of every word and sentence of the language under consideration and to understand what it is for those items to have the particular meanings they do. For Dummett and McDowell it will also, simultaneously, specify what competent speakers know regarding those items and explain what it is for speakers to be competent in that language. If a theory successfully achieved this, then, although it is concerned with providing such an understanding with regards to a specific language, reflecting on the form that the overall theory should take in order to be successful would provide us with a clarification of the general concept of

meaning and what competence in a language is. Such a clarification would concern a concept that is not restricted to the particular language under consideration, and an understanding of competence would involve an understanding of what it is for a speaker to be competent with language in general. The viability of this methodological approach requires drawing a distinction between the invariant content of an utterance and its force. Such a distinction is not one that is uncontroversial, however, and has been denied, in one way or another, by the later Wittgenstein and Charles Travis. 1.2 explains why the distinction is needed for the Davidsonian methodology to be of value, and outlines Dummett's response to the later Wittgenstein and McDowell's to Travis.

Finally, in 1.3, I compare Dummett's and McDowell's shared understanding of the claim that a meaning-theory should be a theory of competency to that of John Foster's. Foster sees the aim of a meaning-theory as specifying something knowledge of which would suffice for competency, contrary to Dummett and McDowell who see the theory as providing a faithful description of the competency possessed by actual speakers. I argue that Foster's position looks to be in danger of not having, as a direct result, the capacity to explain the abilities of competent speakers to understand a potential infinite number of sentences and one which are "novel" to them. This means that, unlike Dummett's conception, what the theory does is pulled apart from a justification for why we think such a general account should be possible to provide. The facts that the theory would have to appeal to in order to correctly characterise the meanings and understanding that speakers actually possess, and how the technical aspect of the theory connects with speakers of the language, would have to be facts about how items in that language are used. This is how the "meaning is determined by use" slogan serves to underpin the correctness of a meaning-theory for both Dummett and McDowell. It is by explaining the correctness of the theory that we provide answers regarding in virtue of what particular items mean what they do and what it is to be competent with those items. One of the major disagreements between full-bloodedness and modesty is how the notion of use should be appropriately characterised. Modesty is content with characterising use in terms of the very concept or thought that particular items express, while full-bloodedness seeks, at the ground level, a non-semantic, non-intentional understanding of the notion in order to achieve a reduction of

the semantic and intentional. Understanding these latter ideas will be the occupation of chapters 2, 3 and 4.

1.1. The “Philosophy of Language” vs. a “Meaning-Theory”

Michael Dummett and John McDowell’s¹ starting point in the philosophy of language is to follow Donald Davidson’s (1967) seminal recommendation that the best way to understand the central concepts that concern the philosophy of language (principally those of meaning, truth and assertion) is to look at the form, in Davidson’s words, that a “theory of meaning” for a particular language should take. The term “theory of meaning” may be encountered in a number of respects, and it would be best to avoid its use altogether to avert confusion. For sometimes it is used to designate a branch of philosophy on a level with “the theory of knowledge”, where the aim of such a theory in this respect is to understand or elucidate the concept of meaning *in general*. Throughout what follows, I will substitute such use of the phrase with “the philosophy of language”.

Other times, as Davidson intended to use the phrase, it is used to refer to a particular kind of formal or semantic theory concerning *one specific* language; a “theory of meaning” for German, say. One aim of a “theory of meaning” in this sense is to specify the meanings of all the words and sentence-forming operations of the language so as to systematically generate, for each sentence, a theorem that we can loosely say “gives the meaning” of that sentence on the basis of the structure we find in it (cf. Davidson, 1967, p. 23). In this sense, the theory aims to specify what the meaning of this or that item is in the language under consideration. Davidson’s original suggestion in “Truth and Meaning” (1967) was that a theory of truth along the lines of Tarski’s truth-definitions, modified in various ways to apply to a natural rather than a formal language, could serve as a “theory of meaning” that accomplished this aim. A second aim, which is either met directly by the formal theory itself, as Dummett would have it, or by arriving at the theory in a particular way, as is the case with Davidson, is that it should also explain in some manner what it is for items of the language to have the meanings they do. That is, in virtue of what facts about a group of speakers makes it the case that *this* item has *that* meaning. Instead of using the phrase “a

¹ See (Dummett, 1975a, p. 1) for an early statement of agreement with Davidson, and for McDowell see (McDowell, 1976, p. 3).

theory of meaning” in this second sense, I will follow Dummett (1991a) by designating a theory of this kind a “meaning-theory”.

Davidson’s interest in meaning-theories was that it is by becoming clear about the general principles by which we could come to construct such a theory that successfully completed both aims that we will arrive at an understanding of the general concept of meaning. What he was focusing on was looking at how to construct such a theory, what its form would look like, and how we could test the theory for its correctness against actual speakers. For a meaning-theory is simply concerned with giving the meanings of sentences of a *particular* language, and, in some way, explaining what having those meanings consists in, and so a *general* understanding of the concept of meaning and language is not provided by it. However, reflection on the general outline that such meaning-theories have to take would indeed be a reflection on a general concept of meaning. By understanding what it is for a meaning-theory to successfully achieve the goals set upon it, we are given a general procedure for understanding what it is for words and sentences to mean what they do in a language, and so we are afforded with an understanding of the general concept of meaning; what gives the sounds we utter and the marks we use the significance they have. This approach to looking at the central concepts that concern the philosophy of language does not, therefore, seek “direct” explanations to those concepts. Rather it seeks indirect, oblique answers to the philosophical problems that surround the concept of meaning by looking at the overall shape a complex theory, that meets the desideratum set upon it, has. Davidson’s methodological approach is expressed well by John Foster:

The point of investigating the conditions for an adequate [meaning-theory] is to gain philosophical insight into the nature of language and meaning, to bring the semantic character of language into the right philosophical perspective. This perspective is not provided by a [meaning-theory] itself, which only purports to give the meanings of the expressions in some particular language. The idea is rather that if we put the right constraints on what giving-the-meanings involves, then characterizing the general method by which such theories can be constructed and verified reveals what meaning-in-language really amounts to. By showing what for certain purposes counts as a [meaning-theory], we show what meaning is. There is an analogy here with the philosophy of science. A scientific theory does not explain the concept of natural law, but there is no better way of explaining it than by uncovering the canons of scientific method to which such theories must conform. Likewise a [meaning-theory] does not explain meaning, but there is no better way of explaining it than by uncovering the conditions

which such theories must meet and the form in which these conditions can be implemented (Foster, 1976, p. 4).

1.2. The Distinction Between Content and Force

This methodological approach that is embraced by Dummett and McDowell requires, from the outset, a distinction to be drawn between an invariant content of an utterance and its force. The distinction is fairly intuitive to understand, with the idea being that there is a common element, but also something different, in utterances of “The door is closed”, “Is the door closed?” and “Close the door!”. What is common is the content of each utterance. The dialectic of Dummett’s work that McDowell engages with is such that Dummett assumes that a meaning-theory that embodies the truth-conditional conception of meaning is the default position.² The theorems that the meaning-theory issues which, in some sense, “give the meaning” of sentences of the language, will therefore be specifying what are in fact truth-conditions. Given this non-neutral framework that Dummett’s dialectic starts out with, we can assume that what is common with each of the three utterances is that they concern the same truth-condition, that the door is closed. What is different between them is that each utterance concerns a different speech-act regarding that truth-condition, or they vary in force. An utterance of the first sentence has an assertoric force attached to it, an utterance of the second has an interrogative force and an utterance of the third has an imperative force. In each case, the same truth-condition is being put forward but the first utterance asserts that the truth-condition obtains, the second asks whether it obtains while the third commands that it be brought about.

Dummett tells us that such a distinction needs to be drawn by anyone who intends on looking at the construction of a meaning-theory, for “the fact is that we have no conception of how to set about describing the employment of any one particular sentence without the help of any general machinery which would involve making a distinction of that

² Dummett himself typically labels this position as a meaning-theory based upon “classical two-valued semantics”. Such a meaning-theory is marked out by Dummett in its acceptance of a cluster of ideas, but primarily through its commitment to the principle of bivalence that every significant indicative sentence is determinately either true or false with the notion of truth becoming “recognition transcendent”. That is, that a sentence may be true (or false) even though there is no guarantee that we will be able, even in principle, to recognise that it is true (or false). The theory is seen as taking such a notion of truth as being primitive and indefinable, with it being the fundamental notion in terms of which the meanings of a languages’ sentences are specified. See “What is a Theory of Meaning (II)” (1976) for a classic example of this dialectical strategy.

kind" (Dummett, 1976, p.39). With the distinction in place, the general task of giving an account of speakers' utterances in a language is significantly simplified. Part 1 of a meaning-theory will be concerned with the truth-conditions of the languages' indicative sentences, whilst Part 2 will concern itself with the various types of speech-act that can be effected in the language. Part 1 in turn is comprised of two elements, the "core" and the "shell". The core of a meaning-theory will consist in a specification of the truth-conditions of indicative sentences of the language from the semantic properties of their parts and the way that they are put together, and giving the truth-conditions of sentences will amount to specify what their meanings are. This allows us to follow Davidson's suggestion that Tarski's work on truth is indeed relevant in the philosophy of language by saying that a theory of truth for a language can serve as the core of a meaning-theory for that language. For Tarski has shown how to construct a theory, for certain kinds of formalised languages, that systematically specifies the truth-conditions of sentences from its repeatable parts and its structure. Davidson's idea is that we should be hopeful in the prospects of extending Tarski's work to natural languages.

The aim of the shell is to explain what it is for the individual items of the language to have the meanings they do. It does this in terms of explaining why whatever it is that the core specifies regarding either the axioms of the theory, in an atomistic account of language, or the theorems issued by it, in a molecular account, or the theory as a whole, in the holistic case, provide the correct interpretation of the language. It is the shell of a meaning-theory that connects the formal, technical machinery of the core to actual speakers of the language, since looking at the core's correctness only makes sense if the language has an independence of its own from the theory to which we can compare the theory to. If the language does not have this independence, then the core only provides a description of a possible language, rather than a natural one (Davidson, 1990, pp. 300-301). Explaining the correctness of the core explains what it is for items of the target language to have the meanings they do because what we would have to do is look at what facts make it the case that the theory provides the correct semantics for the language. For example, by explaining why an axiom of the theory such as "For all a 'x ist rot' is true of a if and only if a is red" correctly displays the meaning of the German word "rot", what we would have to do is look at what facts

make it the case that that word does indeed express the concept *red*.³ Our answer would have to say something about what makes it the case regarding German speakers that means we are right in using the predicate on the right hand side of the axiom to specify the concept that that word expresses. Explaining why we are right to say that "rot" expresses the concept *red* in terms of facts about native speakers *is* to explain what it is for the word "rot" to mean what it does.

With a distinction between content and force in place, Dummett sees a very general, initial shape of a meaning-theory as beginning to emerge in his quadripartite distinction between the core, the shell, the theory of force and the philosophy of language. What seems essential to the viability of a meaning-theory is that a division can be made of utterances into categories according to the linguistic act effected by the utterance, and that there is a notion of invariant content possessed by utterances that is capable of being shared by utterances of sentences with possibly different moods uttered in linguistic acts of varying forces. Without such a distinction, it is far less clear what shape a theory would take that would provide a general method for specifying the meanings of sentences of a language, and one way of reading the later Wittgenstein's understanding of the slogan "meaning is use" is that he seeks to undermine the need for this distinction. Dummett suggests that Wittgenstein's comments can be read in two ways here; either as denying the utility of the distinction between content and force, but leaving open the viability for a theory to give a general method for specifying the meanings of each sentence of a language, or as denying, in principle, the idea that such a general theory can be given.

On the first reading of Wittgenstein's comments, "use" should be comprised of anything that could be counted as belonging to the significance any possible utterance of a sentence has in the language (Dummett, 1976, p. 38). If we were to still hold on to the hope of some sort of general account that specified the meanings of sentences of a language, then, Dummett tells us, the account would have no use for the distinction between invariant

³ Here I follow Dummett and McDowell's use of the word "concepts", which should not be taken as being Fregean. Instead their use of the word corresponds to what Frege called senses. As McDowell notes, "first, Fregean concepts are associated only with predicative expressions, whereas Dummett's considerations are meant to apply to meaningful expression in general. Second, Fregean concepts belong to the realm of reference, whereas the concepts Dummett is concerned with would belong to the realm of sense; they are determinants of content – determinants of the thoughts expressible by sentences containing the associated words" (McDowell, 1987, p. 87).

content and force. Instead the theory would have to issue, for each individual sentence, an account of the meaning an utterance of it would have in terms of its *entire* use, rather than simplifying the task by explaining its meaning by distinguishing two different components of its meanings (Dummett, 1975b, p. 450). However since the spectrum of use is so broad on this reading of use, for it would include everything that, in a particular circumstance, a speaker might be attempting to convey on that occasion, it would seem to place a huge obstacle in the way of any sort of account that did this. We simply have no conception of how we could begin to construct this new type of theory if we are debarred from simplifying the task in some manner by making a distinction between invariant, sharable content and force. For it would seem inconceivable that a theory could give a general method that yielded specifications of the meanings of sentences unless it is organised in such a way that we can see the significance of an utterance as being the result of it containing repeatable elements and a structure that go towards determining an invariant content, with the force of an utterance being a separate part of its significance in that it signals the type of speech-act being performed by the speaker.

Wittgenstein's comments do look to suggest that the distinction that we might be inclined to draw between content and force is not a deep one but instead arises from the availability in language of expressions like "It is asserted that..." (Wittgenstein, 2001, §22). He can also be read as saying that there is no single thing as the practice of assertion which we could use in a classification of speech-acts that can be effected in the language under study. Indeed he goes on to suggest that there is not only no uniform thing we might call the practice of assertion, but that we cannot arrive at any list of speech-acts which we could use to help in simplifying the task of constructing a general account that gave the meanings of sentences of the language, for there are simply countless kinds of speech-acts (Wittgenstein, 2001, §23). Such a denial of the utility of the distinction goes against the very strong intuition that there is a distinct two-way division in the meaning of an utterance (an intuition that is captured in the idea that there is something common but also something different in utterances of "The door is closed" and "Is the door closed?") that it will struggle to explain away. This is not done as easily as Wittgenstein suggests it is when he points to the availability of expressions like "It is asserted that..." within language. His slogan of "meaning is use" does not have to be read as leading to an abandonment of the distinction

either, as it sits comfortably next to the idea that some uses relate to content and others relate to force. Those features of use relating to force will determine the performance of a particular speech-act (perhaps with context as well), and it seems clear that speakers are able to pick up on such features in order to identify the force of another's utterance, as opposed to knowing what is being expressed. It might indeed be true that we will be hard pressed to form wholly demarcated, uniform categories of speech acts, but that also does not mean that the distinction should not be drawn in the first place in aid of theoretical simplicity and utility.

However, the denial that such a distinction can be drawn may result from a position that seeks to deny, in principle, the viability of any sort of general account. Dummett associates this reading of Wittgenstein with the Oxford "ordinary language" school of philosophy. Here Dummett thinks it might be the case that we could provide explanations regarding the meaning of any *one* sentence, on a reading of use that encompassed the entire significance of any possible utterance of that sentence, if we ignore utterances the point of which depends heavily upon context. If a general method for giving the meanings of sentences of a language is seen as being impossible, then the methodology of looking at the form of a meaning-theory is thought of as being "generated by the philosopher's vain hopes of finding pattern where none existed" (Dummett, 1975b, p. 444). Only "particularity" is acceptable, by explaining the use of any one sentence, and "generality" is to be spurned.

This idea that a general account of language is impossible to provide is totally unacceptable for Dummett, and for him runs counter to the obvious fact that anyone who has learnt a language is able to understand a vast or even infinite number of sentences of that language, the majority of which are "novel" to them, in the sense that they are ones which the speaker has previously not come into contact with (Dummett, 1975b, p. 451). These facts cannot be explained, Dummett says, otherwise than by supposing that speakers understand a number of general principles governing the use of words in sentences of the language. The idea is that speakers could hardly understand the meanings of a potentially infinite number of sentences having learned each sentence one at a time; only finitely much can be learned in a finite time. A distinct point that Dummett blurs with this is that speakers can also determine the meaning of an arbitrary sentence they have not encountered before. These capacities can only be explained by seeing the meaning of a sentence as being the

upshot of contributions from repeatable parts or elements and its structure, with such parts making the same systematic contribution to the meanings of other whole sentences in which they occur. Speakers can understand a given sentence by previously understanding the meanings of its constituents and their mode of combination. This explains why speakers can understand a potentially infinite number of sentences, since, although they cannot learn each sentence individually, there being a potentially infinite number of them to learn, there are only finitely many words in a language and finitely many rules that govern their combinatorial possibilities. It also explains how speakers are able to understand novel sentences. As long as a speaker understands the words that occur within a novel sentence and the way they can combine, this allows for the possibility to determine the meaning of the whole even if they have not encountered such a sentence before. This argument, as Davidson notes, depends on a number of assumptions:

...for example, that we do not at some point suddenly acquire an ability to intuit the meanings of sentences on no rule at all; that each new item of vocabulary, or new grammatical rule, takes some finite time to be learned; that man is mortal (Davidson, 1965, p. 8-9).

This truism, that the meaning of a sentence depends upon the meanings of its words and the way they are put together, makes it hard for Dummett to see how there could be any obstacle that in principle prevents a detailing of such general principles in a theory that would have, as a consequence, an explanation of how it is possible that speakers are able to understand a potentially infinite number of sentences and ones which are novel to them. That is, it must be because speakers have an understanding of such general principles governing the use of words in sentences that enables them to have these capacities, and, if such general principles exist and are understood by speakers, then why should it be impossible to make such principles explicit in the form of a theoretical account of them? Dummett's points suggest that we should at least be hopeful in the prospects of some form of general account that did this, and pessimistic in those of particularity (cf. Davidson, 1967, p. 35).

Charles Travis has been a contemporary critic of the usefulness of truth theories that would serve as the core of a meaning-theory, with his objections looking to have the same consequences as the ordinary language school of philosophy's rejection of the sense-force distinction, with a move towards "particularity" and away from generality (Miller, 2013, p.

684). Travis argues that what is said, on different occasions when someone says, say, that something is blue, can be different in ways that a truth theory cannot capture. Indeed, what it is for a particular thing to be blue can differ from occasion to occasion, context to context:

...when, in given circumstances, one speaks of a thing (my car, say) in given terms (one calls it blue, say), what one thus *says* as to how things are, so when one would have spoken truly, is determined by what it is reasonable to expect of that particular describing—reasonable to hold one thus responsible for—given the circumstances of its giving; what expectations would, in those circumstances, reasonably be aroused (Travis, 2006, p. 30-31).

Travis's point is that the meaning of a sentence does not determinately fix an invariant content or truth-condition. Instead, the content of an utterance cannot be detached from a particular occasion or context, for what is said is determined by what is "reasonably expected" in the circumstances of the utterance. This contextualism regarding meaning is far more radical than the obvious cases regarding indexicality ("I", "Here", "Now"), demonstratives, tense, etc., where hope remains that such features can be accommodated in a systematic account. Although such features are indeed context sensitive, they are seen as making the same regular contribution to the truth-conditions of sentences. In the examples that Travis highlights, the moral is meant to be that the content of a sentence can vary dramatically and unpredictably depending upon features surrounding the context an utterance of it has, even when features of indexicality, demonstratives, tense, etc. are not present. For example, someone might say, of a lake, "The water is blue today". In some contexts, what is said is true in the familiar case of the water looking blue when viewed from the side of the bank. In another context, however, what is said might not be true if we are testing the water for a colour dye and are looking to see whether water drawn from the lake looks blue under observation in a beaker, say (Travis, 2006, p. 32). The driving idea, Travis says, might be this:

Content is inseparable from point. What is communicated in *our* words lies, inseparably, in what we would expect of them. How our words represent things is a matter of, and not detachable from, their (recognizable) import for our lives. Calling something (such as my car) blue places it (on most uses) within one or another system of categories: blue, and not red, or green; blue, and not turquoise or chartreuse; etc. If I call my car blue, the question arises what the point would be, on that occasion, of so placing it; or, again, what one might reasonably expect the point to be; what ought one to be able to do with the information that the car

so classifies. What I in fact said in then calling my car blue is not fixed independent of the answers to such questions (Travis, 2006, p. 33).

Travis's conclusion would have it that content and point are in no way separable. This entails that a conception of content as being, in some way, invariant, shareable and what is literally said, in the fashion that Dummett and McDowell would have to understand it in the sort of account they have in mind, is spurious and induced by a misguided aim for generality. In turn, if this conception of content is to be replaced by one that is radically contextualised, this might look to impinge on the usefulness of the methodological approach derived from Davidson, for a truth theory will be unable to capture all the ways that context influences the content of sentences in this manner. It might indeed be the case that a truth theory serving as the core of a meaning-theory cannot capture the subtleties in the various ways that something might be considered, say, blue, as Travis's numerous examples suggest. However, McDowell argues that in the examples that Travis points to, something is still being asserted (or hypothesised, etc.) *to be blue* on all the various sorts of occasions envisaged, and a truth theory might capture that much (McDowell, 2007, p. 364, n. 4). What McDowell looks to be saying here is that although Travis is right to say that a truth theory might not capture the variations in what it can come to for something to be blue, it is not clear that this should be seen as affecting the content of an utterance rather than relating to its point. This would mean that, although acknowledging the types of cases Travis points to, McDowell would be relegating the phenomena highlighted to pragmatics. The viability of reflecting on a general theory would seem to depend on the fact that such phenomena can be accommodated within this distinction. Dummett's response to Travis would likely be the same:

Moreover, particularism led to superficiality for another reason, which can be most tersely stated by saying that it promoted a conscious disregard for the distinction between semantic and pragmatic aspects... Anyone not in the grip of a theory, asked to explain the meaning of a sentence like "Either he is your brother or he is not" or "I know that I am here", would be disposed to begin by distinguishing what the sentence literally said from what, in particular circumstances, someone might seek to convey by uttering it; but, from the standpoint of the orthodox "ordinary language" doctrine, only the latter notion was legitimate – *it* was what constituted the "use" of the sentence; and, if no circumstances could be excogitated, however bizarre, in which it might actually be

uttered for some genuine purpose, then the sentence “had no use” and was therefore meaningless (Dummett, 1975b, p. 445).

Tracing the shape of a meaning-theory demands looking at the form that a general theory about a particular language would take, and that theory, in its generality, might not capture the variations in what it is for something to be considered blue in particular circumstances. Dummett’s and McDowell’s response is that we should not expect our theory to do that anyway, for such features will relate to the point of an utterance and issues concerning pragmatics, which a truth theory will not cover. This would not, however, in any way undermine the usefulness and value of the methodological approach of reflecting on the form of a meaning-theory for a particular language as the best way for understanding the general concept of meaning. There are limitations to the theory, but such limitations do not show that no light is shed on the problems that concern the philosophy of language by following Davidson’s lead even if that theory does not touch the phenomena that Travis points to.

1.3. A Meaning-Theory as a Theory of Competence

Dummett’s defence of the viability of approaching the general concept of meaning by looking at the form of an account that systematically specifies the meanings of a languages’ sentences involves the demand that the theory should have, as a consequence, an explanation of how speakers have the capacity to understand a potentially infinite number of sentences and ones which are novel to them. This demand is coupled, in Dummett’s work, with the demand that the theory should explain what it is for speakers to have the competency they do, which is expressed in his claim that “a [meaning-theory] is a theory of understanding; that is, what a [meaning-theory] has to give an account of is what it is that someone knows when he knows the language, that is, when he knows the meanings of the expressions and sentences of the language” (Dummett, 1975a, p. 3). Although McDowell agrees with this general conception of what a meaning-theory should do, it is not one that is universally shared, and, indeed it is opposed to Foster’s understanding of the Davidsonian project whose comments I began with in section 1.1:

...we can capture all that matters to the philosophy of meaning by putting the original project the other way round. Rather than ask for a statement of the knowledge implicit in linguistic competence, let us ask for the statement of a

theory whose knowledge would suffice for such competence. Instead of demanding a statement of those metalinguistic facts which the mastery of a language implicitly recognizes, let us demand a statement of those facts explicit recognition of which gives mastery. What we are then demanding is still a [meaning-theory], but without the questionable assumption that one who has mastered the language has, at some deep level, absorbed the information which it supplies. The theory reveals the semantic machinery which competence works, but leaves undetermined the psychological form in which competence exists (Foster, 1976, p. 2).

Foster's understanding of what a meaning-theory should do rejects a desire to explain what it is that a native speaker knows when he understands the language. Rather than ask for this, the theory should look to state something, explicit knowledge of which, *would* provide competence of the language under question. It should allow someone, given the theory, to interpret utterances of native speakers without facing the obligation to say what it is that native speakers' competency consists in. Our primary aim should be to understand the concept of meaning by looking at the shape of a meaning-theory that systematically specifies the meanings of the sentences of the language. The notion of competency is only of relevance in this respect in that meanings are inherently something that can be discerned and comprehended. The account will not be specifying *meanings*, then, unless it captures this fact. This is met by demanding that the theory should yield something knowledge of which would suffice for competency or interpretation, which is how Foster understands the slogan that "our philosophical aims demand that a [meaning-theory] be a theory of mastery" (Foster, 1976, p. 4). A theory of competency is primarily being seen through the lens of a theorist's competency for Foster.

The problem with Foster's view is that what the theory sets out to do (yield something knowledge of which would suffice for competency) does not have, as a direct consequence, an explanation of the abilities that speakers have in their capacity to understand a potentially infinite number of sentences or ones which are novel to them. This means that, unlike Dummett's conception, what the theory does is pulled apart from a justification for why we think such a general account should be possible to provide. As Crispin Wright has made clear, at least in the homophonic case (where the object language is the same as the meta-language (the language of the theory)), it is not in virtue of what the theory does that it imposes upon the theory the feature of compositionality that Dummett

thinks is behind the abilities he highlights regarding competent speakers. This is seen in the fact that:

Provided we have a recursive specification of the syntax of the (declarative part of the) language, and provided we are content with the disquotational form of meaning-delivering theorems for which theories of truth are famous, Foster's project is well enough served by a semantic "theory" which merely stipulates as an axiom every instance of the schema:

A is T if and only if P,

where "P" may be replaced by an declarative sentence of the object language and "A" by the quotational name of that sentence. This theory is not finitely axiomatized, but it is finitely *stated* and, in conjunction with the appropriate syntax, it does yield the means for effectively arriving at a meaning-delivering theorem – assuming we have no independent reservations about truth theories on that score – for each declarative sentence in the object-language. It thus fits Foster's bill: it describes information whose possession would suffice for mastery of the (declarative part of the) object-language (Wright, 1986, p. 212).

Wright's point is that a theory that does what Foster asks it to do is met just as well by a theory that consists of an infinite number of axioms of the form he cites. The theory that Wright outlines finitely states something that describes information whose possession would suffice for competence of the language under question by stipulating as an axiom every instance of the schema that Davidson recommends a meaning-theory should issue in. Because such a theory consists of an infinite number of axioms with compositionality not being present, it does not provide an explanation as to how it is possible for competent speakers to understand a possibly infinite number of sentences or ones which are novel to them. Of course, the theory Wright outlines cannot impart the information it describes to someone who did not already have it, but then no homophonic theory can do that.

The lesson that Wright takes from his alternative theory is that there is no connection between Foster's recommendation for what the theory should do and those features that Dummett highlights regarding what a meaning-theory is capable of explaining, features which give us reason to think that such a general account should be possible to provide in the first place. This is unsatisfactory for a number of reasons. One is that there should be a coupling of what the theory is designed to do and why we are justified in thinking that such a theory is possible to give. It also leaves us questioning whether the theory actually does explain anything about the capacities possessed by competent speakers. On Foster's

approach, there is no guarantee that the theory will reveal anything about the semantic parts of sentences or their structure that is actually comprehended in some manner by competent speakers. Yet, as we saw earlier, if speakers can understand a potential infinity of sentences and ones which are novel to them, then surely it is because they have some awareness or understanding of those features of sentences. It seems that any semantic structure that Foster's theory does reveal will be left totally unexplained and unconnected to the competency of native speakers. As Wright says:

Whether the theory aspires to cast light on *our* ability, finite as we are, to master a potentially infinite language, or *our* ability to complete the learning of the language, or on *our* ability to understand novel utterances, or on all three, success must depend, it seems, on its being permissible to suppose that it encodes information which *we* actually possess (Wright, 1986, p. 206).⁴

The alternative meaning-theory that Wright mentions which meets Foster's demand does only apply for the homophonic case. In the heterophonic case (where the meta-language is not just an extension of the object language), Wright concedes that compositionality might indeed need to be invoked because there is no other way for providing meaning-delivering theorems for a language that is distinct to the meta-language (Wright, 1986, p. 211). However, even here, compositionality will be seen as being a feature of the *theory* that meets the interpretable aim of understanding a foreign language. It is out of a technical need and is not seen as a feature of a native *speakers'* competency, which means that the points made above about the connection between compositionality and speakers' abilities still stand.

On the other hand, by demanding that what the theory should do is explain what it is for speakers to have the competency they do, Dummett's recommended task would have as a direct result the capacity to explain the abilities that speakers possess which he highlights. The difference between Foster and Dummett is how to understand the equivalence between a meaning-theory and a theory of competence. For Foster, the equivalence should be read from left to right; specifying the meanings of sentences will suffice for someone given the theory to understand the utterances of native speakers without settling what it is for native speakers to have the competence they do. On the other

⁴ "Encodes information" is perhaps a little stronger than how Dummett, and certainly McDowell, would explain what the theory captures about the abilities of speakers.

hand, the equivalence should be read with no priority, for Dummett, which entails that the theory should provide a faithful description of the character of speakers' competency (Smith, 1992, p. 114); facts about the meanings of particular items should be delivered *simultaneously* with facts about the competency that native speakers have regarding such items. Since the core of a meaning-theory is designed to specify meanings in terms of truth-conditions, the no-priority identification means that it will also specify what native speakers know regarding the items that belong to their language. Since the shell is designed to explain what it is for items to have the meanings they do, it will also, simultaneously, explain what it is for speakers to have the competency they do regarding those items.

The facts that the theory would have to appeal to regarding native speakers in order for it to correctly characterise the meanings and competency of items that belong to the language could only be facts about how those items are used. This is how the "meaning is determined by use" slogan, a slogan that Dummett and McDowell both entirely agree with, underpins the correctness of the theory on their accounts and explains in virtue of what particular items mean what they do. The meaning of a particular item cannot be anything which is unable to be made publicly available in its use, which means that competency regarding the meanings of those items cannot be divorced from public use either. By describing patterns of use, the theory will, then, simultaneously explain the meanings of items and speakers' competency regarding them:

There is no intrinsic absurdity in the project of explaining, for every word, what a grasp of its meaning amounts to and how that grasp is manifested. Equally, there is no intrinsic absurdity in the project of describing, for every word, how it is used, in such a way as to exhibit what constitutes its meaning what it does. The projects are the same: for it is by the way a speaker uses a word that he manifests his grasp of its meaning. It is in just this project, described in the one way or the other, that the task of constructing a meaning-theory consists (Dummett, 1991a, p. 136).

1.4. Conclusion

However, that meaning is determined by use is an entirely programmatic principle and accomplishes very little on its own until it is specified how use is to be characterised and how it determines meaning (Dummett, 1963, p. 188 and p. 190). In fact, it appears so programmatic to say that nothing that does not somehow surface in the use of an expression can be part of its meaning that the principle might as well be conceded from the off (Heck,

2007b, p. 354). The slogan “will thus admit of a wide range of specifications, depending upon how the notion of meaning is explained and how use is thought to determine meaning, as well as upon how the notion of use itself is to be understood” (Heck, 2007a, p. 531). Indeed, this is the point at which Dummett and McDowell part in their agreement over the form that a meaning-theory should take. Although both follow the methodological approach of Davidson as being the most fruitful way for looking at the central concepts, and take a meaning-theory to be a theory of competence in the sense that it should provide an account of the competency of actual speakers (cf. McDowell, 1977, p. 178), they disagree in whether a meaning-theory should be “full-blooded” or “modest” which involves differing conceptions as to how use is to be characterised and how it relates to meaning. With the shared background between the two of them now in place, the forthcoming chapters will outline where Dummett and McDowell come apart in their attitudes regarding meaning-theories. This will be needed in order to understand the incompatibility Dummett raises between the truth-conditional conception of meaning and the minimalist conception of truth as well as why McDowell feels there is no issue in combining these two conceptions of truth and meaning.

Chapter 2

Modest Meaning-Theories

2.0. Introduction

The methodological approach that Dummett and McDowell adopt from Davidson is that it is by reflecting on the form that a meaning-theory for a particular language should take that we are afforded with an approach for looking at the central concepts that concern the philosophy of language, i.e. those of meaning, truth, assertion, etc. In the previous chapter we saw that Dummett's dialectic does not start out from a neutral position but instead assumes that the truth-conditional conception of meaning is the default position. He then goes on to describe the form that a meaning-theory which embodies this conception has to take, and ultimately makes a quadripartite distinction; there is the core, the shell, the theory of force and the philosophy of language. A meaning-theory is concerned with one particular language, and consists of Parts 1 and 2. Part 1, in turn, is comprised of a core, which aims to lay out the correct semantics of the language in a compositional manner, and the shell, which is concerned with providing answers regarding what it is for particular items of the language to have the meanings they do, and what it is for speakers to be competent with those items. Part 2 is the theory of force which is concerned with the various types of speech-act that can be effected in the language.

Dummett's argument that the truth-conditional conception is incompatible with a minimalist conception of truth is predicated on his rejection of "modest" meaning-theories and his embracement of "full-blooded" ones. The disagreement between modest and full-blooded proponents concerns the very ambitious and goals that we should be setting ourselves in the philosophy of language, with full-bloodedness aspiring for reductionism and modesty for "quietism" and description. This is why looking at these ideas which surround Dummett's incompatibility argument is a fruitful way of understanding the work

of Dummett, McDowell and Davidson, for these ideas lie at the very centre of their work. It is the task of the current chapter to outline meaning-theories which are modest so as to understand one end of the spectrum that each of the three philosophers lie.

In 2.1 I begin the chapter by outlining Dummett's characterisation of modesty, as it was he who introduced the technical terms of modesty and full-bloodedness into the debate. Dummett looks to distinguish two ways a meaning-theory can be modest. A meaning-theory can be modest if it does not itself contribute to an explanation of what it is to possess the concepts expressible in the language, but allows for the possibility for such an explanation to be provided in terms of a prior and independent theory of thought. A meaning-theory could also be modest if it denies in principle the possibility of any explanation of concept possession. I set aside the first type of modesty that Dummett identifies, as seeing a theory of thought as taking priority would be conceiving language along the lines that psychologism recommends. A general undefended assumption that I make throughout this thesis is that psychologism (along with behaviourism) is to be avoided as it forms part of the common ground that is shared by Dummett, McDowell and Davidson. The second type of modesty that Dummett identifies is the modesty he reads in McDowell's work. However Dummett's reading does not provide a faithful description of McDowell's position. In light of this, I recommend moving away from Dummett's characterisation of the position.

Instead McDowell's modest meaning-theory should be seen as being a meaning-theory that is non-reductionist in nature and only provides trivial answers to questions concerning the meanings and competency of particular items of a language. In 2.2 I connect this goal with McDowell's interest in homophonic theories that use the very word or sentence that an item expresses in order to specify its content. Such theories are used to establish his contention that non-triviality should be avoided, as the correctness of a homophonic meaning-theory is obvious. If explaining the correctness of a meaning-theory is how we answer what it is for items of a language to have the meanings they do and what it is to be competent with those items, and the correctness of a homophonic theory is obvious, then this would look to undermine the idea that substantial, non-trivial answers can be given. However I argue that this is the strong contention of McDowell's position that should be rejected. It is only by assuming that we have a competence of the target language in a

homophonic theory that we can see the obvious correctness of the theory. Making that assumption looks to illegitimate, however, for it looks to be a flat refusal to answer the questions being asked non-trivially, rather than providing us with independent grounds for why we should not be after non-triviality in the first place. McDowell's position also lacks the resources to informatively account for the difference between knowing, of a sentence, that it is true and knowing the proposition expressed by a sentence. A final criticism of McDowell's position is that it has little to say about the capacities of speakers to understand a potentially infinite number of sentences and ones which are novel to them.

McDowell is not only concerned with homophonic theories, as he sees reflections on the form of heterophonic theories as bringing out more of the substance involved in making peoples' actions rationally intelligible. McDowell's interest in such theories is explained in 2.3, while 2.4 connects the ideas outlined with how he thinks the central concepts that concern the philosophy of language are illuminated through a methodological approach of "conceptual geography". This looks to reject a central assumption of Dummett's dialectic, that a meaning-theory will take some one concept as central from which the whole practice of language can be described. I approach this idea by outlining McDowell's response to objections raised against Davidson's initial position in "Truth and Meaning". The chapter finishes with how McDowell's distinctive reading of the Davidsonian methodology should be described as being "quietist" in nature.

2.1. Dummett's Characterisation of Modesty

We can begin to look at how we should characterise modesty by continuing with Dummett's narrative, as it was he who set up the whole framework for the debate by introducing the technical terms of "modesty" and "full-bloodedness". Often Dummett characterises modesty as being a theory that only successfully completes the task of laying out in a compositional manner the correct semantics of the language under study. In other places he suggests that it is a theory that only aims at completing this task, and shirks its responsibility of providing any answers regarding what it is for particular items of the language to have the meanings they do and what it is for speakers to be competent with those items. A full-blooded theory, on the other hand, aims, and provides, answers to both sets of questions. This characterisation, however, still allows room for two different types of modest theories, which Dummett differentiates between (Dummett, 1975a, p. 25, and, 1991a, p. 111-112):

- (1) A meaning-theory is modest if it allows an explanation of concept possession to take place, but the theory does not *itself* contribute to this task.
- (2) A meaning-theory is modest if it denies, in principle, the possibility of providing any explanation of concept possession.

One way that a meaning-theory could be modest in the first sense would be if we claimed that our answers regarding possession of concepts can be given in terms of a prior and independent theory of thought. That would amount to saying that thought is prior to language in order of explanation; it will mean that we can ultimately provide a general explanation as to what it is to possess a concept independently of having the linguistic means of expressing it. It will also mean that questions concerning what it is for particular words of the language to express the concepts they do and questions concerning what it is to possess that concept can be prised apart. This is because we can still explain what it is for words of the language to express the concepts they do in terms of facts about use. What we would do, however, is construe use in terms of the contents of mental states of speakers, with the contents of beliefs being the most central.

For example, we might explain why the axiom “For all a, ‘x is red’ is true of a iff a is red” correctly displays the meaning of the word “red” by saying that speaker’s predicate this predicate of something with the intention of getting an audience to believe that the speaker has a belief to the effect that something is red.⁵ This explanation, although explaining what it is for the word “red” to express the concept it does in terms of using it,

⁵ This type of reading of the principle that meaning is determined by use is suggested by McDowell (McDowell, 1980, p. 37) when discussing an objection to his own type account, the objection being that meaning is more illuminatingly analysed in terms of the communicative intentions of speakers along the lines proposed by Grice. A “Gricean” notion of use is also discussed by Heck within the context of these issues (Heck, 2007a, p. 542-547, especially p. 545) as being one way of answering the linguistic strand concerning particular items in terms of facts about use. However, as Heck notes (Heck, 2007a, p. 544), Dummett does not contemplate this sort of suggestion as he thinks that those that take thought as being prior to language will not explain what it is for a word to express the concept it does in terms of use but will explain it in terms of speakers managing to associate a concept with a particular word “in the head”. Dummett then uses Wittgensteinian inspired ideas to reject this sort of explanation (See Dummett, 1978a, p. 98, and 1991a, p. 111). McDowell, on the other hand, rejects a Gricean reading on the grounds that notions concerning the psychological states of speakers are equal in terms of the conceptual level they occupy to notions regarding the linguistic acts effected in the language (McDowell, 1980, p. 35-36). Davidson also takes a similar line (Davidson, 1974, p. 143-144).

can no longer be seen as simultaneously providing an explanation as to what it is for speakers to possess the concept *red*, precisely because advocates of this type of modest theory think that such an answer can be given in terms of a prior and independent theory of thought. The sort of answers that advocates have in mind here will not appeal to speakers' linguistic means of expressing concepts, and will also be non-trivial. This type of modesty, however, is highly controversial, and Dummett warns us that it will ultimately lead to psychologism and the view that language is a code for thought where our understanding of one another is construed as being "no more than a *hypothesis*", whereas if communication is to be possible, what competency in the language consists of must "lie open to view, as Frege maintained that it does, in our use of the language, in our participation in a common practice" (Dummett, 1978a, p. 102). For present purposes, I want to put such accounts to one side, as I want to focus on how a meaning-theory can be modest in a second, much more interesting, sense.

This second type of modesty is the one that Dummett sees McDowell as advocating, for McDowell agrees with Dummett in his rejection of psychologism; he has no interest in wanting to explain what it is to possess a concept independently of understanding a language, and neither does his version of modesty force him into such a position. This is something that McDowell thinks Dummett is unaware of, as he claims that part of Dummett's objection to modesty is that the position necessarily involves a conception of language as a code for thought (McDowell, 1987, p. 93). This is inaccurate, however, since the places where Dummett makes his accusations regarding a code conception of language are the places where he is explicitly talking about type (1) modesty, and McDowell can only make his claim because he is unaware that Dummett makes a clear distinction between modest theories of type (1) and (2).

When Dummett is discussing McDowell's brand of modesty, it is the type of modesty he has in mind with (2) when he says that the position denies, in principle, the possibility for a meaning-theory to provide any sort of explanation of concept possession. This is why he tells us that McDowell's modesty is so unacceptable, since declaring that an explanation of concept possession is impossible to construct is tantamount, in Dummett's eyes, to declaring that we cannot shed any light on the general notions of meaning and competency by reflecting on the form that a meaning-theory has to take. This second type of modesty is then

seen as being even more distasteful than the former kind, since although Dummett sees the first type of modesty as lapsing into a code conception of language, it still attempted to provide an explanation as to what it is for particular items of the language to have the meanings they do, and it anticipated that a non-linguistic account of concept possession can be given in terms of a prior and independent theory of thought (Dummett, 1991a, p. 112). On the current type of modesty, Dummett sees no attempt being made at any sort of answer regarding particular items of the language, with the task being declared impossible to complete. Referring to McDowell's position, this is why we find Dummett accusing modesty of being committed to the idea that it is simply a brute fact that particular items of a language have the meanings they do (Dummett, 1987a, p. 258) and that the meaning of an item is "a mysterious non-natural property" of it, as if it were something independent from the use of that item in the language. Dummett goes on to demarcate where he thinks the difference between himself and McDowell lies:

In a terminology I have sometimes used, McDowell appears to consider that a correct ascription of meaning to a word is *barely* true. He denies that what renders it true lies open to view; and he cannot maintain that it lies within the inner consciousness of the speakers without becoming guilty of that psychologism which he repudiates. In my opinion, by contrast, the words and sentences of a language mean what they do in virtue of their role in the enormously complex social practice in which the employment of the language consists; it is the task of a theory of meaning, as I see it, to give a systematic account of that practice, and so to explain in virtue of what words and sentences mean what they mean, or, more exactly, in what their having those meanings consists (Dummett, 1987a, p. 259).

The fact that McDowell overtly agrees with many of the ideas expressed in the above cited passage, which Dummett singles out as being distinctive of his own approach, suggests that Dummett has not understood McDowell correctly. The agreement between the two ultimately follows from the fact that both authors take inspiration from the later Wittgenstein, for they both continually emphasise in their writings that meaning should be identified with use, that language is a social practice, that a meaning-theory is a theory of linguistic competence and that competence in a language should be characterised, in some sense, as being an ability. Indeed, one of the central claims that Dummett makes in the above passage, that on his account the correct ascription of meaning to a word lies entirely "open to view", is one that McDowell has forcefully and continually emphasised throughout his

work. For emphasising the need to see the correctness of an axiom as lying open to view on the surface of speakers' use of the language is one way of rejecting psychologism, but this does not mean, in itself, that either author is committed to behaviourism, since both attempt to construe language use as being something that is inherently a rational activity.

Where McDowell sees the difference as lying between full-bloodedness and modesty is in his denial that we should attempt to provide the sort of answers that full-bloodedness seeks with regards to the meanings and competency of particular items of the language within the shell of a meaning-theory, and this is informed by his stance towards the correct approach we should be taking for looking at the central concepts. McDowell's modest answers are then being viewed as the only way to hold on to the common elements he shares with Dummett whilst successfully steering a course between psychologism on the one hand and behaviourism on the other. What I suggest, therefore, is that we should try to avoid outlining modesty by relying on what Dummett has to say about the matter. A better procedure is to look directly at the sort of answers that modesty gives regarding the meanings of particular items. This is not just because this is where McDowell tells us the disagreement lies, as it is evident that Dummett himself makes his accusations of bruteness, and the account's denial of being able to explain competency in a language, based upon such modest answers.

2.2. Modesty and Homophonic Meaning-Theories

McDowell's modest position begins with a concentration on homophonic meaning-theories, where the meta-language is an expansion of the object language, for, as we will see, McDowell feels that such theories are a useful device in explaining his position and warding off philosophically perilous temptations that might lead one to a false picture of how things are.⁶ He also follows Davidson in using a Tarskian truth theory as serving as the core of a meaning-theory, and so on the type of account that McDowell advocates, the theory will terminate in axioms, for one place predicates, of the following form:

⁶ In focusing on homophonic theories, McDowell is setting aside complications concerned with indexicality, since, as McDowell observes, his dispute with Dummett does not concern the technical project of constructing a Tarskian truth theory that can handle such expressions and would serve as the core of a meaning-theory, or one that would actually yield homophonic T-sentences. Instead it concerns the nature of his answers given in the shell of a meaning-theory and the resultant impact this has on his conception of the theory of force (McDowell, 1981, p. 319, n. 15).

For all a, "x is red" is true of a if and only if a is red.
For all a, "x is funny" is true of a if and only if a is funny.
For all a, "x is untrustworthy" is true of a if and only if a is untrustworthy.
For all a, "x is prime" is true of a if and only if a is prime (Dummett, 1987b, p. 282).

A theory of competence is then seen as being grafted on to this formal theory to yield knowledge ascriptions like; "A knows that for all a, 'x is red' is true of a iff a is red" and such ascriptions display the semantic knowledge competent speakers have. In this way his account is therefore in line with Dummett's own insistence that a meaning-theory should be seen as being, simultaneously, a theory of linguistic competence.

We saw in the previous chapter that it is by explaining the correctness of the axioms within the shell of a meaning-theory that we come to answer questions concerning what the meanings of particular items consist in, and what it is for speakers to be competent with those items, and the correctness of the core is explained in terms of facts about native speakers' use of the language, which is how the notion of use serves to answer and underpin such questions. However, as I have previously acknowledged, that meaning is determined by use is an entirely programmatic principle and accomplishes very little on its own until it is specified how use is to be characterised; it is only by doing this that we come to see how the notion of use relates to that of meaning. What is distinctive about McDowell's modesty is that use is to be explicitly characterised in semantic and intentional terms, and concerns the very concepts/thoughts that the shell is designed to explain possession of, for he typically characterises use in terms of the "saying that..." or "expressing the thought that..." idioms (although his account will also use notions of use that contain more specific terms that introduce forces of differing types, like "assert that...", "ask whether...", "command that...", etc. (McDowell, 1997, p. 111)).⁷ These notions of use are not to be, in any way, further analysed or reduced to notions which are of a lower conceptual level, such as behaviouristic responses to stimuli or to non-semantic terms in general, and neither should they be understood in terms of notions that are independently available from those that the theory ultimately hopes to elucidate. Use cannot be construed so as to concern different concepts/thoughts from those that the items express either, in order to provide any non-

⁷ The reason why McDowell primarily talks in terms of sayings or expressions of thoughts, rather than assertions, is because the words at the level he is discussing can figure as unasserted components in whole utterances, such as the antecedents of conditionals (McDowell, 1997, p. 110).

trivial explanation regarding what it is for an item of the language to have the meaning it does and what it is to possess the concept that an item expresses. Modesty therefore ardently sets its face against any sort of reductionism, as the account does not attempt to reduce the specifically semantic to the non-semantic, and does not deprive itself of either a prior understanding of such notions which it takes as given or of an understanding of the language that the meaning-theory concerns when giving its answers that the shell is designed to answer regarding particular items.

What this reading of the principle implies is that once the relevant notion of use is specified concerning meaning and competency, meaning and use do not come apart. We can say: meaning just *is* use,⁸ where use is characterised in semantic and intentional terms and concerns the very concepts/thoughts that particular items express. Our explanation as to the correctness of the axiom “For all *a*, ‘*x* is red’ is true of *a* iff *a* is red” will therefore be given in terms of facts and behaviour about how speakers use that predicate, where we would have to appeal to such ideas as that when a speaker predicates that predicate of something we should see him as expressing the thought, of something, that it is red (McDowell, 1997, p. 111), and similarly for the rest of the axioms throughout the theory. McDowell’s direct answers regarding particular items of the language are therefore, schematically, as follows: the word “red” means what it does because speakers use that predicate, in conjunction with other suitable words, to express thoughts to effect that things are red, and what it is for a native speaker to possess the concept *red* is that they have certain practical ability in that they know how to use the word “red” in a sentence to express thoughts to that effect. This is as deep an answer we can give when we look to find specific practical abilities to correlate to the individual axioms or theorems of the core within the shell.

This non-reductive stance from McDowell is then related to his interest in homophonic meaning-theories, for the shell of a modest theory attempts to provide its answers by relying on a benefit of a competence of the language in question (McDowell, 1984, p. 249), or by appealing to facts that are overtly available only to those who already have a competence of the object language (McDowell, 1981, p. 324). What this amounts to

⁸ Which is a different claim to Dummett’s: “a meaning, not reducible to use, which I attach to a word, on the other hand, is something which I can recognise only in myself” (Dummett, 1963, p. 190). Dummett’s use of the word “reducible” suggests that he has a very differing conception of how use should be characterised and how it relates to meaning.

saying is that the core of a homophonic meaning-theory provides the correct semantics for the language in question. The correctness of the axioms within the theory, and the theorems yielded by it, are obvious to an audience who is already competent in that language. For the axioms are read as displaying which concepts are expressed by which words of the language, and the theorems read as specifying what thoughts are expressed by particular sentences of the language. An audience who is already competent in that language will already have this knowledge precisely in virtue of the fact that they are competent speakers; a competent English speaker given the theorem, “‘Snow is white’ is true if and only if snow is white”, can clearly see that the sentence used on the right-hand side of the bi-conditional does indeed specify what would be asserted in an assertoric use of the sentence “Snow is white”.⁹

This is why framing a meaning-theory as a homophonic theory, although not mandatory or necessary, is related to the modest position, and is a way of warding off certain temptations that McDowell sees Dummett as succumbing to (McDowell, 1987, p. 99). For homophonic theories are seen as being more appropriately placed to show how the idea that meaning lies open to view both avoids psychologism but does not fall into behaviourism, as it shows how the idea of openness amounts to no more than the fact that snow is white can be heard or seen in the words “Snow is white” by people who are able to put their own minds into those words if they had occasion to do so (McDowell, 1987, p. 99). Rejecting psychologism amounts to rejecting the idea that meaning does not lie hidden behind utterances, as it were, in the minds of speakers but that it is outwardly shared in a

⁹ These ideas are presumably behind Dummett’s accusation that there is little significant contrast between a modest meaning-theory and a translation manual (Dummett, 1975a, p. 5). Dummett tells us that a translation manual can impart a competence of the target language only if it presupposes a competence of the translating language, as well as the meta-language. If we only had a understanding of the meta-language, and not the translating language, then we would know which sentences of the target language translate which sentences of the translating language without knowing what any of the sentences of either language actually mean (Davidson, 1973, p.129). For example, it is in principle possible for someone to know that “Schnee ist weiß” in German means the same as “Sniegas yra baltas” in Lithuanian, without knowing their common meaning. Although meaning-theories are radically different to translation manuals in their achievements, modest meaning-theories presuppose a competence of the target when they come to explain their correctness by using the very concepts/thoughts that the axioms/theorems concern. It must be in this sense, then, that Dummett makes his comparison regarding the inadequacies of translation manuals and modest meaning-theories based upon them relying, in some sense, on a competence of another language in order to achieve their goals.

common public practice. In concerning itself with the very concepts/thoughts that the axioms/theorems express in giving its answers to particular items, modesty shows that a psychologistic conception of language as a code for thought is mistaken by showing that meaning and content are capable of being present in the words of the language by being heard or seen in those very words by those who are already competent in the language and initiated into the practice.

This might seem to have behaviouristic overtones, and leave out the rationality of language, by moving away from a conception of meaning and language that is bound up with the (inner) mental lives of speakers. The perplexity about how such a stance can avoid behaviourism is relieved, though, on a modest theory, as meaning is outwardly characterised in terms of the content of actual and possible assertions and thoughts made in the language. The rationality of language is, then, overtly displayed on the surface level of use that McDowell is content with leaving non-reduced by the fact that we typically make rational sense of the behaviour of ourselves and others in a language we have mastered precisely under intentional descriptions such as what a speaker is doing on a particular occasion in uttering a given sentence is asserting that snow is white, say. Those who are competent in the language can put their own mind into those words and express thoughts to that effect to others, and see others as doing the same as well, by such facts being open to outward view.

The temptations that McDowell can be seen as warding off in concentrating on homophonic meaning-theories is that openness to view, although correctly conceived as being a line to take between the two pitfalls of psychologism and behaviourism, should not lead one to go too far in an effort to avoid psychologism by describing linguistic practice in non-semantic terms regarding the outward behaviour of its practitioners. In doing so, the resultant position will exceed the initial, correct, impulse of steering clear of psychologism and leave it in a position in which it will be unable to capture the obvious rationality of language-use. A further temptation, that there are non-trivial answers to questions concerning particular items of the language, is also sought to be guarded against because the obvious correctness of a homophonic theory is meant to show that the puzzlement that might be felt when considering what it is for a particular item of the language to have the meaning it does should not be seen as demanding a substantial answer. Instead,

reductionism and non-triviality should both be avoided, and openness to view amounts to no more than the thought that "Snow is white" can be used to assert that snow is white, a fact that those who are competent in the language can recognise.

Since this is the reading that McDowell gives as to why the theorems issued by a Tarskian truth theory are correct, the shell is not being thought of as distinct from the core, contrary to how we saw Dummett set up the dialectic of the debate on the assumption that the truth-conditional conception is the default position. Instead the distinction between the core and shell has been lost for McDowell, with his answers regarding particular items simply being read off from the core. For what the truth theory actually states regarding particular words of the language should not concern us, as the axioms actually state satisfaction conditions in the case of the predicates of the language. Instead it becomes a matter of how we view those axioms once they are in place in giving an intelligible description of speakers' use of whole sentences within the language under study. McDowell essentially tells us that the axiom "For all a, 'x is red' is true of a iff a is red" can be read as if it said something of the stronger and more direct form "The word 'red' means red". When we ask what it is for the particular word "red" to mean red, no deeper answer can be provided than that "red" means red because speakers of the language use "red" to predicate redness of something. Although the core is connected with actual speakers of the language, the connection is made by relying on a benefit of a competence of the language in question and no non-trivial answer can be given as to what it is for particular items of the language to have the meanings they do. There is, then, no need to conceive the shell as providing substantial, non-trivial answers which would have to be given in a separate component of the meaning-theory to the core.

There is nothing wrong with McDowell's point that constructing a meaning-theory as being a homophonic theory is perfectly acceptable. Ordinary indicative sentences can be used to assert things about the world, and quotation yields something suitable for the construction of remarks about sentences. Attaching a truth-predicate to the quotation of a sentence produces a sentence that is also suitable for asserting something about the world, which is, in fact, the same thing that could have been asserted by using the named sentence. A meaning-theory can then be seen as issuing in "disquotational" specifications of truth-conditions that specify what can be asserted by using the sentence named on the left-hand

side of the bi-conditionals (McDowell, 1976, p. 7 and 2007, p. 352). There is also nothing wrong with saying that the correctness of a homophonic meaning-theory is obvious to someone who is already competent in the language in question. That we should avoid psychologism and behaviourism by insisting that meaning lies open to view also seems right. McDowell can then be seen as using these points regarding homophonic theories to ward off two temptations; that we should seek to reduce specifically semantic/intentional notions to non-semantic, non-intentional terms, and that we should not seek non-trivial, non-substantial answers regarding particular items of the language. His fear of reductionism is entirely well-founded, as his concentration on homophonic theories to ward off a move towards such a position is given further weight by his worry that a reductive meaning-theory will ultimately fail to capture the rationality of language, and be unable to reconstruct a cluster of interconnected notions that are bound up together with rationality, i.e. those of truth, assertion and content. His arguments against reductionism will be discussed, and endorsed, in chapter 5. That homophonic meaning-theories should be seen as undermining the desire for non-triviality regarding particular items is, however, dubious, and there seems to be little else in McDowell's battery of arguments against Dummett that lends further credence to his position on this issue. Instead the weight of argument against non-triviality would look to rest with his appeal to the obvious correctness of a homophonic theory.¹⁰

To see the dubiousness of McDowell's line of argument here, take as a sample question that the shell is designed to provide an answer for: "What is it for the sentence 'Snow is white' to mean what it does?". McDowell wants to say this question does not deserve serious attention because the correctness of the theorem, "'Snow is white' is true if and only if snow is white", is apparent. For if the correctness of a theory that issues in such homophonic theorems is in that sense obvious, then he thinks it is hard to see why the question what it is for a theorem to be a correct theorem should be taken as serious and as needing a substantial, non-trivial answer. However, this conclusion simply does not follow.

¹⁰ As Heck (Heck, 2007a) notes, however, part of McDowell's argument here might also be viewed as being a "how else" argument; if use cannot be described in non-semantic or behaviouristic terms, then how else is it meant to be given in such a way so as to also avoid trivialising the relationship between use and meaning. This is something that will occupy us over the next chapters, and will be relevant to when Davidson is discussed in chapter 6.

For those of us who are competent in English, we can indeed recognise the theorems acceptability in that the sentence used on the right-hand side of the bi-conditional does specify what would be asserted in an assertoric utterance of that sentence. However, as Dummett notes (Dummett, 1991a, p. 107), it is only by assuming that the meta-language is an extension of the object language (or that we already understand the object language) that we can see this. And, as Heck argues (2007a, p. 537-538), that assumption looks to be illegitimate at this point, for it simply looks like a flat refusal to answer precisely the question being asked non-trivially, rather than providing independent grounds for why we should not be asking it to be answered non-trivially in the first place. The resulting dialogue would not be dissimilar to – Q: “What is it for ‘Snow is white’ to mean that snow is white” – A: “That’s obvious, you can see that the sentence ‘Snow is white’ is used by speakers to assert that snow is white”. That was already clear from the beginning though, and it does not address the question we were posing.¹¹ As Heck (2007a) notes:

If someone asks “Why am I here?” it is no answer to tell her that “here” conventionally refers to the place of utterance. She knew *that*: What she wanted to know was why she was in the place she happened to be at that time, which she picked out via the word “here”. And if someone asks “Why is ‘Snow is white’ true

¹¹ This, and the forthcoming arguments, look to rest on the contention that the content of a sentence is not internal to its use. Dummett is certainly of this persuasion, which is expressed in his comment that the “central task of the philosophy of language is to explain *meaning* is, that is, what makes a language *language*. Consider two speakers engaged in conversation. To immediate inspection, all that is happening is that sounds of a certain kind issue from the mouths of each alternately. But we know that there is a deeper significance: they are expressing thoughts, putting forward arguments, stating conjectures, asking questions, etc. What the philosophy of language has to explain is what gives this character to the sounds they utter: what makes their utterances expressions of thought and all these other things?” (Dummett, 1978a, p. 96). Davidson expresses a similar conception of a sentence in construing use in terms of the attitude of “holding-true” which is available to the radical interpreter prior to an understanding of the content of that sentence. Conceiving of a sentence in this manner also comes out in his discussion of indirect discourse when he claims that the “trouble lies rather in the chance that the same sentence may have different meanings in different languages – not too long a chance either if we count *ideolects* as languages. To give an example, the sounds ‘Empedokles liebt’ do fairly well as a German or an English sentence, in one case saying that Empedokles loved and in the other telling us what he did from the top of Etna” (Davidson, 1968, p. 98). The closest that McDowell comes to this conception is in his claim that a meaning-theory “would compendiously describe the extra contribution, over and above the sharable sensory intake, that his competence with the language makes to his cognitive position on any of the relevant occasions. For any possible utterance in the language, it would yield a route from a non-interpreting description of it to an interpreting description. Thus it would reveal the relations between sounds and – to speak intuitively – significance that, in a sense, constitute the language” (McDowell, 1980, p. 32).

if and only if snow is white?" it is no answer to tell him that the word "true" is conventionally used so as to sustain disquotation. He knew *that*: What he wanted to know was why the truth of the sentence "Snow is white" stands or falls with the whiteness of snow – rather than, say, with the greenness of grass... the question being asked is what it is about an utterance of this sentence that makes it mean anything at all, and what it is that makes it mean the very thing it does. The question, that is to say, is what the relevant difference is between "snow is white" and "blurg is white"; and between "snow is white" and "grass is green" (Heck, 2007a, p. 536-537).

Given a no priority view regarding the idea that a meaning-theory is a theory of competency, what we are asking for in posing the sample question regarding the meaning of the sentence "Snow is white" is, essentially, a parallel question to one that Dummett poses regarding speakers' competency. When discussing the inadequacies of modest meaning-theories, Dummett draws the distinction between knowing, of a sentence, that it is true and knowing the "proposition" expressed by the sentence (Dummett, 1975a, p. 8). The difference lies in a difference between (A) and (B):

(A) Knowing that "'Snow is white' is true if and only if snow is white" is true

(B) Knowing that "Snow is white" is true if and only if snow is white

(A) expresses a piece of trivial knowledge, not in the sense that I have previously been describing a theorem as trivial, but instead it is trivial in the sense that it expresses something that can be recognised by anyone who understands that whatever instantiates the general form of the above theorems (" p " is true if and only if p) expresses a truth. Someone can recognise this on the basis of having a grasp of the predicate "is true", the connective "if and only if", the notion of a letter acting as a name for a description of a sentence and a letter acting as a place-holder for the very sentence named. This knowledge can be possessed, then, without actually understanding the meaning of the sentence, which can be seen if we change the example theorem to: "'Sniegas yra baltas' is true if and only if sniegas yra baltas".¹² Knowing that the theorem expresses a truth is something that a monolingual

¹² This point can perhaps be made clearer still in cases of testimony. For example, someone could be told that "Professor Quine is attending a conference on semantics" with having never heard of Quine or of semantics. This person can only be credited with knowing that the sentence "Professor Quine is attending a conference on semantics" is true because they do not know who Quine is and they have no idea what semantics is either. They do not know the meaning of the sentence, and they

English speaker can know. What (B) expresses, on the other hand, is not trivial in that respect since it states an eminently learnable and forgettable fact about the relationship between an English sentence and the world (Evans & McDowell, 1976, p. xi) and is what a modest theory will ascribe to competent speakers of English since (B) can only be possessed by someone who understands the meaning of the sentence "Snow is white". The difference between (A) and (B) is, then, that the sentence "Snow is white" is understood in (B) and not in (A). What Dummett asks for is an explanation of what knowledge will get someone from (A) to (B), which will then be an explanation as to what a speakers' competency consists in when we ascribe to him the knowledge expressed in (B), and it will also explain the force behind ascribing this knowledge to him as opposed to that expressed in (A) (Dummett, 1991a, p. 104).

McDowell's answer as to what will get someone from (A) to (B) is that a speaker needs to understand the sentence "Snow is white", and understanding the sentence "Snow is white" is knowing how to use it. Knowing how to use it is knowing what thoughts can be expressed by using "Snow is white" (McDowell, 2007, p. 357), but, by treating a truth theory as serving as a meaning-theory and by taking it as known what thoughts sentences of the language can express, that knowledge is precisely the knowledge that is expressed in (B) for McDowell. (B) cannot be taken as the piece of knowledge that will get someone *from* (A) *to* (B) with any informativeness, and so McDowell is left with nothing independent to account for the difference between (A) and (B):

...we were entirely right in our first inclination, to regard it as a necessary and sufficient condition of someone's knowing what "The Earth moves" means that he know that it means that the Earth moves, that is, that he know the proposition expressed by the corresponding M-sentence. But it shows equally that we were also right to regard the M-sentence as being quite unexplanatory of what it is to know the meaning of the sentence "The Earth moves". The simplest way we have to state its unexplanatory character is by observing that we have so far found no independent characterization of what more someone who knows that the M-sentence is true must know in order to know the proposition it expresses, save that he must know what "The Earth moves" means: knowledge of that proposition cannot, therefore, play any part in an account of that in which an understanding of that sentence consists (Dummett, 1975a, p. 9).

do not understand what is being said, which is the sense in which Dummett is using the word "proposition" in his discussion of these ideas (Dummett, 1991a, p. 70).

Appealing to homophony was designed to dispel the puzzlement that might be felt when considering what it is for particular items of the language to have the meanings they do and what it is to be competent with those items by pointing to the obvious correctness of such a theory. The result was meant to be that we should see such questions as not demanding substantial answers. However, by insisting that we need to rely on a benefit of a competence of the object language in giving our answers to such questions, the account does not provide any sort of interesting explanation as to the difference between (A) and (B), yet it does not seem unreasonable to assume that we should be after something more substantial than the trivialities pointed to. Instead, as I said, McDowell's stance looks to be one of flat refusal to answer the questions being asked, rather than giving us anything to go on to quieten our asking of them. Far from undermining any puzzlement, McDowell's position looks to add to it.

A homophonic meaning-theory that has as its core a Tarskian truth theory will, indeed, show how a particular sentence's meaning depends upon the meanings of its parts and the way that they have been put together, and how these parts in turn make a systematic contribution to meanings of further sentences, by showing how particular T-sentences are derivable from the axioms of the theory governing the constituent words of the mentioned sentence and axioms governing the modes of sentence-formation exemplified by it. McDowell says that it would be perverse to deny that a theory along these lines would effect *some* explanation regarding what competence in a language consists in (McDowell, 1997, p. 119), against Dummett's comment that the appearance of structure in a modest theory is a fraud; "the articulation of the theory plays no genuine role in the account of what constitutes a speaker's mastery of his language" (Dummett, 1975a, p. 17). McDowell had previously elaborated on this defence by telling us that:

...in order to claim that a modest theory effects no segmentation of the ability to speak a language into component abilities, Dummett must disallow as irrelevant a segmentation effected "as from *inside*" the content expressible in the language, by specifications of practical abilities in such forms as "the ability to use 'NN' so as to be understood by speakers of the language to be expressing thoughts about NN". Here, too, it is tendentious to equate the thesis that the capacity to speak a language should be articulated "from inside" content, on the one hand, with a picture of that capacity as wholly devoid of structure, on the other (McDowell, 1987, p. 102).

In this respect, we can take McDowell's response here as articulating what his account will say the difference between (A) and (B) is. A modest meaning-theory will not simply say that a competent speaker knows that the sentence "Snow is white" means that snow is white, or that it can be used to assert that snow is white. Instead it will detail how he knows this on the basis of understanding the meanings of the component words and their mode of combination, along with a suitable range of other sentences in which those component expressions would figure and make the same systematic contribution to the meanings of other whole sentences. This accords with the idea outlined in chapter 1 that the meaning of a sentence depends upon the meanings of its words and the way they are put together. The account would then be detailing some articulation of competence of the language into components and a structure displayed in the relevant T-sentences for particular sentences of the language. The thought is that this would show what it is that competent speakers possess when they have the knowledge ascribed in (B), as opposed to (A), because it would detail how their knowledge of (B) is derived from understanding the meanings of the sentences' constituent expressions and their mode of combination. It is this knowledge, then, that someone must know if they are to have the knowledge ascribed in (B) as opposed to (A).

However, when the theory comes to yield the theorems issued by the core/shell, it will do so from a collection of axioms that are also homophonic in nature. Competence of the words of a language is then given in terms of the axioms governing those words, which will be of the form; "'Snow' denotes snow" and "For all a, 'x is white' is true of a if and only if a is white". The same question arises here as it does above – where does the difference lie between:

(A*) Knowing that "For all a, 'x is white' is true of a if and only if a is white" is true

(B*) Knowing that for all a, "x is white" is true of a if and only if a is white

Anyone who knows that anything that instantiates the general form of the above axioms ("For all a, 'x is F' is true of a if and only if a is F") expresses a truth will have the knowledge ascribed in (A*), even though they do not know what "is white" means (Dummett, 1975a, p. 11). Again, they will know this on the basis of having a grasp of the predicate "is true", the connective "if and only if", the notion of a letter acting as a place-holder for a description of

a predicate and a letter acting as a place-holder for the predicate described. In order for McDowell's proposed answer regarding the difference between (A) and (B) to go through, we need to ascribe to speakers the knowledge expressed in (B*) and not (A*). That is, they must know the meaning of "is white", "snow", and their mode of combination in order to yield an understanding of the sentence "Snow is white".

Here the same story plays out again. McDowell's answer as to the difference between (A*) and (B*) is that "is white" is understood in (B*) and not in (A*). Understanding "is white" is knowing how to use it, which is knowing what difference its presence in a sentence makes to the thoughts that can be expressed by using it (McDowell, 2007, p. 357). That is, it requires knowing that predicating that predicate of something yields something suitable for expressing the thought, of that thing, that it is white. However, this is again precisely the sort of knowledge that (B*) expresses when we treat a truth theory for a language as achieving a set of entitlements stronger than what the theory actually specifies (satisfaction conditions, in the case of predicates of the language) and when we already assume an understanding of what concepts are expressed by particular words of the language. McDowell has no independent materials to account for the knowledge that differentiates (A*) and (B*), and without being able to do so, he still looks to be without an independent explanation as to the difference between (A) and (B).

This problem, that McDowell has nothing informative to tell us regarding the difference between (A) and (B), has the consequence that it is hard to see how his account has anything interesting to tell us regarding how speakers have the capacity to understand a potentially infinite number of sentences and ones which are novel to them (Miller, 2014, p. 674). The previous chapter noted that explaining how speakers have such abilities is one of the goals that is sought to be achieved by reflecting on the form of a meaning-theory for a particular language. However, in being unable to tell us anything substantial regarding the difference between (A) and (B), it seems that the only resources that McDowell has to explain the capacities that we are interested in is the truism that competent speakers know what thoughts sentences of their language can be used to express, and they have this knowledge on the basis of knowing how to use the words of their language and their mode of combination. In particular, the segmentation of abilities that McDowell cites do not take us very far in detailing how a speaker can yield an understanding of a sentence they have

previously not come in to contact with. His answer as to how it is a speaker can understand the novel sentence “N.N. is agile” is simply that they know how to use “N.N” to express thoughts about N.N. and they know how to use “is agile” to express thoughts about agility. On the other hand, if we were given an account that specified something independent, and so non-trivial, regarding the difference between (A) and (B), then such an account will indeed provide us with the materials to explain informatively what enables and underlies someone’s ability to understand novel sentences.

2.3. Modesty and Heterophonic Meaning-Theories

McDowell’s direct answers regarding particular items of the language, and his concentration on homophonic meaning-theories, have to be located within his interest of heterophonic theories as well, however. The point of emphasising the value of homophonic theories was that we want a theory that is usable to make sense of speakers of a language in a way that steers a course between psychologism and behaviourism. If we focus exclusively on such theories, McDowell warns us that we may miss how much goes into the condition that a meaning-theory has to make rational sense of speakers (McDowell, 2007, p. 352). This is the context in which heterophonic theories are important to highlight for McDowell. They bring in more of the substance that is involved in this condition, and looking at them emphasises more clearly the way in which he thinks the Davidsonian methodology of looking at the form of a meaning-theory helps elucidate the central concepts that concern the philosophy of language. For although McDowell only uses semantic and intentional notions of use in explaining the correctness of the core of a meaning-theory, with such notions being taken as given, in order to recognise and identify how we should see speakers using the words of their language, a large number of other considerations need to be brought forward. It is in this respect that viewing the task of constructing a meaning-theory for a previously unknown language is of value. Viewing the task in this way shows what would need to be brought to bear in order to identify the use of speakers’ sentences to make an overall rational fit regarding the items that belong to their language. Such a process would again not deprive itself of semantic and intentional notions, but would instead need to use a rich battery of such concepts. Light will then be cast of such concepts, not by reducing them to those that are deemed to belong to a lower conceptual level, or those that are independently available

from those we are interested in, but by instead locating them with each other in this process of understanding a previously unknown language.

Although at times I have slipped into framing the discussion at the level of the axioms of the theory, McDowell seemingly aims to give a molecular rather than an atomistic account of language. The difference between the two theories lies at the level at which our explanations regarding particular items, and the connection with actual speakers, is given. If the theory is focused with providing such explanations at the level of the axioms of the theory by correlating specific answers regarding what it is for a given word to mean what it does and what practical abilities speakers have when they understand that word, then the theory is atomistic. If, on the other hand, the theory makes its connection with actual speakers primarily at the level of whole sentences, and only derivatively at the level of its axioms, then the theory is molecular. The notion of use primarily relates to sentences, as it is only by using a sentence in an utterance that speakers can say anything in language. If the methodological approach we have adopted requires us to look at facts about use, then our explanations as to the correctness of the core needs to be given at the level of the individual theorems of the language. Our order of explanation requires us, then, to give primacy to sentences over words.

One way of ensuring that our theorems do accord with speakers' use would be to make this stipulation up front, as it were, and demand that the theory is usable to make sense of speakers of the language in a way exemplified by the condition that if a speaker were to utter a sentence, and was seen as making an assertion, then the theory should issue in a theorem for that sentence of the form "*s* can be used to assert that *p*", where "*s*" is replaced by a structural name of the sentence and "*p*" by a sentence that is used to make their utterance intelligible. That would be the direct approach. A less direct approach would be that so long as the ends of the theorems are so related ("*s...p*"), on the basis of the structure in object language sentences, it does not really matter what fills the gap in-between. Instead we can still read the theorems as if they said something of the more direct form. Obviously we need to fill in the blank with something, and McDowell suggests that the blank can be read as "is true if and only if" which yields something that maintains the relation between "*s*" and "*p*", and the work of Tarski has shown how we can derive such theorems on the basis of the structure we find in the object language. Our theorems will

therefore be of the form of T-sentences, “*s* is true if and only if *p*”, that overtly specify what are in fact truth-conditions of the languages’ indicative sentences and means that the core of the meaning-theory will take the form of a Tarski truth theory for the language.

However, even if we could construct a meaning-theory that issued in theorems of the more direct form, McDowell cites a truistic connection between truth and assertoric content that ensures that the theorems would still be issuing in specifications of truth-conditions, even if they did not overtly represent themselves as doing this. The truistic connection that McDowell cites in this respect is that if one asserts that *p*, then what one asserts is true if *p*, false if $\sim p$. What one asserts is that *p*, and it being the case that *p* is necessary and sufficient for the truth of what one asserts. If *s* is a sentence that can be used to assert that *p*, and *p* is necessary and sufficient for a speaker’s assertion to be true, then this ensures that the contents of assertions cannot but be specifications of the truth-conditions for the sentences used to make those assertions. This truism that McDowell cites is the only philosophically hygienic conception of truth he thinks there is, and captures what is right about the idea that the truth-predicate functions as a device of disquotation (McDowell, 1987, p. 89). For what it entails is that a mentioned sentence is true if and only if things are as a use of the mentioned sentence says they are. This explication of the concept of truth is also one that relies on a benefit of a competence of the object language by helping itself to the “that *p*” construction and so by presupposing it as known what sentences of the language can be used to assert.

Since we are directly interested in the correctness of the theorems, and only by derivation for the axioms, the axioms of the meaning-theory then become theoretical posits within a theory that aims to display correct ascriptions of meaning and competence at the level of the T-sentences issued, and the axioms can only be understood in terms of how they contribute to displaying the possibilities for the use of whole sentences. Identifying how we should see speakers’ use of the words of their language is therefore also achieved by derivation, since our task would be to first identify how we should see speakers using the sentences of their language, and then make informed judgements about the use of component words. The words in a sentence are repeatable elements which can occur in a multitude of other sentences and make the same systematic contribution to the meaning of the whole. These other sentences will have further, differing, component words as well. It would therefore only be by seeing whether the meaning-theory coherently hangs together

by entailing T-sentences that are deemed as making the best rational sense of native speakers regarding particular areas of the language at a time that we could be sure that we had correctly identified the use of the items that belong to that sector of language.

McDowell tells us that we would need to integrate the theory into an account of the mental lives of speaker's as well; it would need to cohere into an understanding of their beliefs, judgements, desires and other close psychological states like hopes, fears and wishes, etc. For these psychological states often form the setting against which language use happens, and a meaning-theory must make clear the importance that language has in the lives of its speakers. He also takes himself to be following Davidson at this point (McDowell, 1987, p. 103), by arguing that attributions of content to speakers' utterances and attributions of content to their psychological states are "systematically interlocked", in that a meaning-theory should provide the basis for attributions of both these things simultaneously. Part of what is involved here reflects one way of reiterating the claim that a meaning-theory should steer a course between psychologism and behaviourism, in that learning to acquire a language is becoming "minded" and gaining an orientation to the world (McDowell, 1987, p. 105). That is, that a speaker equips himself with an ability to possess content, and to have dealings with content that is involved in having beliefs, desires, etc., when they acquire their first language. The concept of meaning and those that concern psychological states are, then, of equal status with no conceptual asymmetry between them, and there is no hope of reducing one to the other in this respect (Evans & McDowell, 1976, p. xv). There is also no epistemological asymmetry in this process of making out a previously unknown language as being rationally intelligible, as notions relating to psychological states would not be any more accessible to someone undertaking this enterprise than specifications of the content of actual and possible assertions/sayings that the meaning-theory is designed to issue in; "we do not know what someone means unless we know what he believes; we do not know what someone believes unless we know what he means" (Davidson, 1967, p. 27), and likewise for other psychological attitudes. For similar reasons to the above, McDowell suggests that the theory would ultimately need to be fitted with the non-linguistic behaviour and actions of speaker's in general, as well as the environment in which their utterances occur, and so the account would have to cohere with a complete "anthropological" account of the total lives of speakers (cf. Wiggins, 1980, p. 199).

Filling in the condition that a meaning-theory has to make best rational sense of speakers by ensuring that whatever replaces “*p*” on the right-hand side of the theorems issued gives the meaning of the named sentence of the left-hand side, will therefore be a very extensive enterprise to undertake, since it will require fitting the meaning-theory with such an anthropological account. But herein lies the benefit of concentrating on heterophonic theories, for understanding the principles by which we could come to understand speakers of a previously unknown language involves making explicit what is involved in finding peoples actions, linguistic or not, intelligible as manifestations of rationality (McDowell, 2007, p. 352). Such an enterprise would have to use a large range of concepts, such as that of saying things, of asserting things, of believing things, being in a position to know things, making mistakes, informing other of things, having a motive to mislead others about certain things, and so on (McDowell, 2007, p. 361). Understanding what it is to make sense of thought, speech, action, etc. is, then, achieved by understanding the form of a meaning-theory for a previously unknown language that makes speakers of that language rationally intelligible, with the idea being that the richer the vocabulary and concepts used, the more improved the insight is. It is by seeing how such concepts must hang together for this kind of intelligibility to be possible at all that McDowell thinks we are given an improved understanding of them, and so not by denying ourselves a presupposed understanding of them with the hope that we can reduce such notions by reconstructing them later on within the meaning-theory.

2.4. McDowell’s Conceptual Geography

By arriving in this way at the acceptability of a Tarskian truth theory serving as the core of a meaning-theory, McDowell tells us that he avoids an obligation to give a general, independent account of the notion of truth aside from a platitudinous elucidation of that concept that refers us back to the “that *p*” construction. For what he is not suggesting is that we can explain, analyse or reconstruct the problematic concept of meaning in terms of an independent purchase on the notion of truth alone. That such an obligation is forced upon someone who were to take this explanatory strategy of assuming the notion of truth to analyse that of meaning is because the promise to illuminate the notion of meaning by saying that a meaning-theory for any language is a theory of truth for that language looks to require an obligation to say what, in general, a theory of truth for any language is, as the

explanatory weight of the theory rests entirely on the notion of truth (McDowell, 1976, p. 4). Completing this task of saying what a theory of truth for any language is would then be elucidating a general notion of truth, one not relativised to a particular language as it is in Tarski's work on formalised languages.

If we are taking this explanatory strategy, then, on the one hand, it would be *prima facie* suspect to simply rely on an assumed prior understanding of the notion of truth without then saying anything further about that notion and what is assumed regarding it that helps elucidate the problematic concept of meaning; if we want to be satisfied that we have a general account of the notion of meaning, then we need to be satisfied that we have a general account of the notion of truth, the notion in terms of which we are to understand that of meaning (cf. Strawson, 1970, p. 180). On the other hand, the fact that this strategy is after an analysis of the notion of meaning suggests that we cannot say that the predicate that is used in specifying the form that the theorems should take is a different predicate for each language under study, one that is relativised to that language on the pattern of Tarski's "true-in-*L*", where "true" is semantically inert. One reason for this is that if we are after a *general* account of meaning, then it looks dubious to explain that notion by relying on an understanding of the notion of truth-in-a-*particular*-language (McDowell, 1976, p. 4). Another reason is that an understanding of the notion of truth-in-a-given-language will flow from an antecedent understanding of meaning or content.

Davidson has been particularly clear on these issues (Davidson, 1990, pp. 285-288), in stating that Tarski's work on truth does not define the general concept of truth. Tarski shows how a metalinguistic predicate, "true-in-*L*" (where "*L*" is not variable but the name of a language and an un-detachable part of the predicate), can be explicitly defined for a number of formalised languages. These definitions do not show what these predicates have in common, however, which would explain why they are all *truth*-predicates; what is common to the truth-predicates must be part of the content of the notion of truth. For Tarski's truth-predicates are defined in terms of the notion of satisfaction, and satisfaction is in turn defined by enumerating cases by listing each predicate of the language and stating the conditions under which they are satisfied. Since satisfaction is defined for that language by cases, and the truth-predicates are defined on the back of the notion of satisfaction, a definition of a truth-predicate given in this way cannot tell us anything about the general

case. This is seen by the fact that adding a new word to the language introduces a new satisfaction relation, and hence a new truth-predicate, and there is nothing in the truth-definitions themselves that show how to extend the truth-predicate to cover the introduction of this new word because satisfaction is simply defined by enumeration.

A proponent of the discussed explanatory strategy, when faced with the demand that they have to provide a general account of the notion of truth, might now refuse to provide such a general account but instead retreat to position that states that Tarski's truth-definitions that characterise truth-for-a-particular-language provide us with what we need. This move is blocked off, however, because Tarski's truth-definitions are given by stipulating an adequacy condition, in the form of "Convention T", on the relationship between "*s*" and "*p*" that ensures that any theory that defines a predicate, defines a truth-predicate for the language, by stating that whatever replaces "*p*" on the right-hand side of theorems issued must be the same sentence as the one "*s*" names, or a translation of it in the meta-language in which the theory is stated. Appealing to the notion of sameness of meaning or thought expressed, or that one sentence translates another, however, looks to be debarred at this point when the promise is to analyse the problematic notion of meaning.

McDowell's change of tact is, as I said, not to explain, analyse or reconstruct the notion of meaning in terms of a purchase on the notion of truth. Instead his position "claims no particular conceptual illumination from the notion of truth as such" (McDowell, 1980, p. 43). For he tells us that what fills the gap between "*s*" and "*p*" is not important, which is why it can be schematically filled in as "is *F* if and only if". That the theory must meet the condition that it make rational sense of speakers of the language by fitting into a complete anthropological account of them, to ensure that the sentences used on the right-hand side of the theorems issued specify what would be asserted in an assertoric utterance of whatever sentence is named on the left, means that "*F*" can be replaced by "true". The work of ensuring that "*s...p*" are so related is done by fitting the meaning-theory into such an account and not by an independent purchase on the notion of truth. The platitudinous connection that he cites between truth and assertoric content does indeed guarantee that the extension of the envisaged predicate is that of a truth-predicate, and that the theory will be specifying truth-conditions even if it did not overtly show itself as doing this. But the fact that "*F*" can acceptably be written as "true" is not something that McDowell feels has to be

acknowledge and appreciated before one gains an understanding of the significance and nature of the theory, and so before one gains an understanding of the notions that are to be illuminated. That is done by looking at how such a meaning-theory fits in within a broader account that makes native speakers' linguistic and non-linguistic actions out as manifestations of rationality:

...by the end there are so many diverse collateral constraints on any θ that will provide the recipe to annex to an arbitrary sentence a content suitable for purposes of the interpretation of utterances of s , that we do not even need to stipulate that θ should be a theory of truth (Wiggins, 1980, p. 200).

Such considerations do not concern the core of the meaning-theories internal structure, except in so far as that one of desideratum that McDowell wants is that the theory should show how the meaning of a sentence is determined by the meaning of its parts and the way that they are put together (McDowell, 1980, p. 32), where it transpires that Tarski's work is of relevance. Responding to a line of argument from P. F. Strawson (1970), who envisages a proponent of the truth-conditional approach as taking the above explanatory strategy of having the burden of explanatory weight fall on the notion of truth, McDowell tells us that the concept of truth need not figure at a first-stage analysis of the concept of meaning. Instead the order is the reverse, for his proposed theorist, as the notion of truth enters only at the end of his account, with the thesis being, not that meaning is what a theory of truth is a theory of, but that truth is what a theory of meaning is a theory of (McDowell, 1976, p. 8):

The predicate characterized, in its application to sentences of a given language, by a theory of the sort he [Strawson] envisages would be a truth-predicate; but this thesis appears, not as a purported analysis – even an interim analysis – of the notion of sentence meaning, but as a subsequently-noticed consequence of what gives such theories their claim to count as components of theories of meaning (McDowell, 1980, p. 35).

On this way of ensuring that a meaning-theory makes rational sense of speakers, one that side-steps reconstructing the concept of meaning from the concept of truth, McDowell avoids an objection that was made against Davidson's initial construal of the project. For a worry that Davidson wanted to guard against when he stated his initial position was that by extracting a richer and more obscure concept (meaning) from one that is more basic and clearer (truth), we could construct true, but not meaning-giving, T-sentences; "Snow is

white" is true if and only if grass is green. Such counterexamples to a theory that attempts to specify only correct theorems results from the fact that Davidson has to impose a weaker adequacy condition on his theory than Tarski's Convention T, by not assuming the notion of translation but only that of truth. The threat was seen as being avoided because the meaning-theory would have to systematically specify a true T-sentence for every sentence of an infinite language from a collection of finite axioms. With this condition in place, it would be hard to see how such a theorem would be issued on the theory, because it could only result from a meaning-theory that assigned "snow" with grass and "white" with green things, and so, although it yields a true T-sentence in this case, it would lead to false T-sentences somewhere else in the language; "plants are white" is true if and only if plants are green (Davidson, 1967, pp. 25-26).

However, as Foster (1976) and Soames (1989) famously pointed out, this does not rule out constructing other types of incorrect T-sentences. For example, we may conjoin any logical truth or mathematical theorem to the axioms governing the predicates of a language which will then yield theorems that, although pass the test of preserving truth for all the T-sentences derivable from the theory, nevertheless do not specify the meanings of those sentences; "Snow is white" is true if and only if snow is white and arithmetic is incomplete. (Soames, 1989, p. 577). McDowell's reading of the project avoids such problems, for in the process of ensuring that the theorems are correct, the theorist would have to match a sentence on the right-hand side of the theorems in such a way that ensured that the content that is being attributed to a speaker's utterance and his psychological states is plausible, or sufficiently intelligible, in light of the speaker's actions, environment and circumstances. Faced with the choice of a theorem making out a speaker as asserting that snow is white in the presence of freshly fallen snow, or one seeing him as asserting that snow is white and arithmetic is incomplete, McDowell's theorist can simply rule out the second reading of the speaker's utterance on the basis that there would be little reason to think he would be making that observation, and it would require crediting him with a belief and knowledge of something that we would not typically think he had a knowledge of.

It is in this sense that the platitudinous connection between truth and assertoric content "guarantees" that the extension of the envisaged predicate is that of a truth-predicate and that the theory would be a true theory of truth for the language. But "it would

be the guaranteeing fact, and not the guaranteed fact, that suited the theory to serve as a [meaning-theory]" (McDowell, 1977, p. 173). For given a theory guaranteed to be a true theory of truth for a language by only yielding true T-sentences, Foster and Soames show that this fact alone would not allow it to serve as a meaning-theory for the language. That is, it is not because the theory is a true truth theory that allows it to serve as a meaning-theory. Rather it is because the theory can serve as a meaning-theory that allows us to make rational sense of native speakers that means that it would be a true theory of truth for the language.

What McDowell's strategy means, then, is that he avoids an obligation to give a general, substantive account of the notion of truth, aside from elucidating that concept in terms of a truistic, platitudinous connection he cites between truth and assertoric content, because no explanatory weight falls upon the notion of truth. This in turn questions a central assumption of Dummett's dialectic; that a meaning-theory will take some *one* concept as "central" from which the whole practice of language can be described, which, for the truth-conditional approach, will be the notion of truth (Dummett, 1973b, p. 223). Indeed, McDowell is not even after the type of explanation of meaning that the assumption would require:

What I am proposing here, then, is not an elucidation of the notion of sense in terms of other notions still less any hope of reducing it to those others, but simply a description of its relation to those others; the hope being that a notion that is at first sight problematic may be rendered less so by an explicit account of its location, so to speak, in the conceptual space in which we normally find our way about without thinking (McDowell, 1976, p. 7).

Reductionism is to be avoided, and meaning is not to be understood in terms of a prior understanding of the notion of truth. Instead, McDowell takes as given semantic and intentional notions, and any anxiety that surrounds the notion of use that is concerned with asserting or saying something with a given content is to be rendered less so by locating it with other notions that belong at the same conceptual level in an account that is concerned with making rational sense of speakers of a foreign language. This is how overall illumination of the central concepts is achieved for McDowell by following the methodological approach derived from Davidson. Reflecting on the form that a meaning-theory has to take is reflecting on what would be involved for a meaning-theory to provide acceptable specifications of the languages' sentences, and this in turn would have to include

a reflection on a complex picture that is in view with a total anthropological account. McDowell's cited notions of use are not to be part of a second stage analysis of the notion of meaning as Strawson recommends, in which the first stage proceeds by analysing meaning in terms of truth, a second stage then points to the notion of the content of an assertion or saying to elucidate that of truth, and finally a third stage uses non-linguistic notions such as those of the intentions or beliefs of speakers to understand assertion (McDowell, 1980, p. 35). McDowell's philosophical enterprise is, then, one of conceptual geography; a mapping of the interrelations of concepts that are thought of as causing anxiety within the philosophy of language, and we are to do this without depriving ourselves of a presupposed understanding of them:

What we need, on this view, is not conceptual analysis, but a perspicuous mapping of interrelations between concepts that, so far as this exercise goes, can be taken to be already perfectly well understood. It is a striking fact that in the mapping offered by my theorist, the concept of meaning as such does not even appear. So far from analysing the notion of meaning, he suggests the radical thought that in describing the understanding of a language we can get along without it (McDowell, 1980, p. 36).

2.5. Conclusion

McDowell's distinctive reading of the Davidsonian methodology is a piece of philosophical activity that often falls under the heading of "quietism", something associated with what Wittgenstein is engaged with in the *Philosophical Investigations*. Here substantive philosophical theses are given way to an enterprise whose aim is to prevent falling into difficulties we might find ourselves falling into in the course of being engaged in constructive philosophy, and it does so by explaining away the appearance that we are confronted with genuine philosophical problems to begin with. Quietism's principle method of doing this is to be therapeutic – to quieten the need for substantial explanation in a fashion that Wittgenstein recommends in which "the work of the philosopher consists in assembling reminders for a particular purpose" (Wittgenstein, 2001, §127). Assembling reminders is saying something that we already know which might have been neglected or forgotten in discussions of a topic, and it certainly does not consist of saying anything distinctly new that we did not already know beforehand. This is why Wittgenstein tells us that if we were to engage in this type of activity, it would never be possible to debate such

philosophical theses because everyone would agree on them and would not need to be argued into accepting them (Wittgenstein, 2001, §128).

McDowell's appeal to homophonic meaning-theories is one such way that he attempts to reveal that the desire to provide substantive answers should not be followed; in this case it is in response to the question what is it for a particular item of a language to have the meaning it does. The assembled reminder is that the obvious correctness of a homophonic theory cannot be in doubt, and if explaining the correctness of a homophonic theory is how we answer such questions concerning particular items, then these questions do not deserve serious attention. The appeal to homophonic meaning-theories to establish this argument was argued as being illegitimate in the above. His trivial answers to in virtue of what particular items mean what they mean do not provide us with any satisfactory answer as to the difference between the knowledge ascribed in (A) and in (B), and they do not take us very far in explaining how speakers have the capacity to understand a potentially infinite number of sentences and ones which are novel. Nevertheless, the fact that McDowell takes a quietist stance does not mean that his account has no work to do, for the work that it faces is the work of showing that substantive explanations are not called for (McDowell, 2009, p. 371). This is highlighted in how he thinks illumination of the central concepts that concern the philosophy of language is to be achieved through his conceptual geography. The work of showing that we do not need to reduce or analyse such concepts is done by looking at a complex and extensive picture that is involved with an anthropological account of a foreign language, and by locating the central concepts with each other in a conceptual space that he thinks we do not normally have trouble finding our way about except when engaged in the type of constructive philosophy he repudiates. There is, then, "no question of quickly dismissing a range of philosophical activity from the outside" (McDowell, 2009, p. 372), for there is no guarantee that it will be easy to uncover something underlying the desire for reductionism that would provide therapy for Dummett.

Chapter 3

Full-blooded Meaning-Theories

3.0. Introduction

A modest meaning-theory, in the sense discussed by McDowell, is a meaning-theory that only provides trivial explanations about in virtue of what particular items mean what they do and what it is to be competent with those items. In the homophonic case, the theory would do this by using the mentioned sentence of the target language to specify the content of that sentence, while in the heterophonic case the theory would use a sentence from the metalanguage that could be taken as expressing the same thought as the sentence that was being dealt with. The position also embodies an approach for looking at the central concepts that I described as being one of conceptual geography. Dummett regards advocates of modesty as shirking the intellectual responsibilities that are placed upon them (Dummett, 1987b, p. 284). Instead he forcibly advocates a “full-blooded” meaning-theory which is located at the opposite end of the spectrum to modesty on which Dummett, McDowell and Davidson lie. It is because Dummett thinks that a meaning-theory should explain truth and meaning together and be full-blooded that he thinks there is an incompatibility between the truth-conditional conception of meaning and a minimalist conception of truth. In order to understand his incompatibility argument we must, then, understand what it is for a meaning-theory to be full-blooded. This will be the primary aim of this chapter, with a more critical examination of Dummett’s ideas being made in chapter 5.

In order to provide a characterisation of full-bloodedness, this chapter will follow Dummett in assuming that the truth-conditional conception is the default position. I will then describe how he thinks the core and shell should be related to the overall illumination he wants to achieve of the central concepts on such accounts in 3.2. This will be contrasted

with McDowell's reading of the truth-conditional approach, a reminder of which is given in 3.1, in order to gain a clearer perspective of the gulf between modesty and full-bloodedness. A full-blooded theory is one that aims to provide non-trivial explanations about in virtue of what particular items mean what they do and what it is to be competent with those items. A "maximally" full-blooded theory, of the sort Dummett advocates, adds to this the requirement that the central concepts that concern the philosophy of language should be reduced to those of a lower conceptual level from the semantic and intentional. This demand for maximal full-bloodedness then impacts the nature of the theory of force, which will have to play a far more substantial role for Dummett than that given to it by McDowell. In section 3.3, I outline how the theory of force will have to reconstruct the central concepts and show how to derive the content of utterances from "sub-surface" material given in Part 1 of the meaning-theory if Dummett is to achieve his reductive ambitions. In outlining the shape that the theory of force will have to take, I note Dummett's distinction between what is said in an utterance and the point of saying it. This will be relevant in chapter 5 when I consider a possible response from Dummett to the criticisms I make of his account. Given an idea of what Dummett's truth-conditional meaning-theory will look like, the issue regarding the incompatibility between such meaning-theories and a minimalist conception of truth will be approached in 3.4. It is because Dummett wants to provide non-trivial explanations about in virtue of what particular items mean what they do and what it is to be competent with those items, and thinks truth and meaning can only be explained together, that he makes his claims of incompatibility.

3.1. Recap of McDowell on Modesty

In order to understand how Dummett thinks a meaning-theory is related to the central concepts, we need to bear in mind what we established in the previous chapter with regards to McDowell's modesty. There we saw that, for McDowell, what a meaning-theory should be primarily interested in is specifying the content of assertions that can be made by uttering the language's indicative sentences, with an acceptable meaning-theory doing this by issuing in theorems that specify the meaning of every appropriate sentence of a target language by specifying what sentences of that language can be used to assert. In this respect, ignoring complications concerning indexicality, a Tarskian truth theory that issues in theorems of the form "*s* is true if and only if *p*", which overtly specify truth-conditions, can

be read as if they said something stronger and of the more direct form “*s* can be used to assert that *p*”. Such a truth theory can therefore be seen as serving as the core of a meaning-theory. Our explanations as to the correctness of theorems that are issued by a Tarskian truth theory, which are initially conceived as being given in a shell, are made by appealing to facts that are overtly available only to those who already have a competence of the object language and concern the very thoughts that the sentences express. It would do this by saying that the T-sentences are correct because someone who is already familiar with the language can see that the sentences used on the right-hand of the theorems do in fact determine what a native speaker would be asserting in an assertoric use of whatever mentioned sentence is in question on the left-hand side; “‘Snow is white’ is true if and only if snow is white”, is a correct theorem because “Snow is white” means that (or can be used to assert that) snow is white.

If this is the reading that we give as to why the theorems are correct on the truth-conditional account, then the shell is not conceived as being distinct from the core. The core specifies the meaning of every sentence of the language by specifying the condition under which it is true, but since McDowell has justified the use of a Tarskian truth theory in general, and explained the correctness of the theorems of a truth theory, by saying that the T-sentences should be read as being indirect ways of generating theorems of the form “*s* can be used to assert that *p*”, the core and the shell merge. There is no need to go on and give any further explanations in an entirely separate shell that would be distinct from the fact that the specifications that are provided by a Tarskian truth theory are indeed correct specifications of what would be asserted by a speaker in an assertoric use of the languages indicative sentences. Even if we could construct a meaning-theory that issued in theorems of the more direct form, McDowell’s truistic observation that if one asserts that *p*, then what one asserts is true if *p* ensures that the meaning-theory would still be issuing in specifications of truth-conditions even if it did not overtly do this in the same way that a Tarskian truth theory does.

The core/shell must then interact with a theory of force. The theory of force would do two things for McDowell. First it should provide us with enough information that allows us to identify linguistic utterances as performances of speech acts of specified types (assertions, questions, commands, etc.), so that we can know when a native speaker is making an

assertion, asking a question, issuing a command, etc. Secondly, it should allow us to pair an indicative sentence, whose meaning is specified by the core/shell, to utterances of related non-indicative or elliptical sentences which will suitably provide the content of utterances of the latter two types of sentences. Presumably there must be a third element in the theory of force, that McDowell does not elaborate as fully on, which allows us to identify the mood of sentences of the language (indicative, imperative, optative, interrogative), so that we know which sentences are indicative and which are not. The identification of indicative sentences would not be done solely on the basis of syntactic structure, so as to leave room for not crediting evaluative sentences such as, say, "Vanilla ice cream is nice" with truth-conditions (McDowell, 1987, p. 89, n. 6). A more sophisticated identification of indicative sentences would presumably be given by incorporating the account within a broader anthropological setting. The interaction between the core/shell and the theory of force will therefore allow us to move from a description of a speaker's utterance un-interpreted (he uttered such-and-such noises) to a description that tells us that he is asserting that *p*, asking whether *p*, commanding that *p*, etc., where what replaces "*p*" is the sentence used on the right-hand side of the theorem that the core/shell issues for the indicative sentence that the theory of force has identified as being paired with the sentence that was in fact uttered (which could be the very same sentence in some cases) (McDowell, 1976, p. 5). The meaning-theory would then "reveal the relations between sound and – to speak intuitively – significance that, in a sense, constitute the language" (McDowell, 1980, p. 32).

McDowell agrees with Dummett in following the methodological approach derived from Davidson of looking at the form that a meaning-theory for a language would have to take as being the correct way for approaching the main concepts that the philosophy of language concentrates on. However, on the modest position, the aim is to render these concepts less problematic and dispel our confusions surrounding them, and not to reduce them or explain them in terms of notions of a lower conceptual level. Setting aside concerns that relate to the theory of force, and singling out assertoric speech acts for special attention, this is done by construing the idea of looking at the form of a meaning-theory in terms of looking at what an acceptable theory that issued in theorems which indicate what sentences of the language can be used to assert would have to do. The idea being that such a meaning-theory, in order to be acceptable, would have to cohere within a broader project, a complete

anthropological account, that attempts to make sense of speakers' linguistic behaviour and psychological states, as well as their non-linguistic behaviour in general. The project attempts to achieve this task of making sense of speakers by explicitly employing those concepts it hopes to shed light on, as is seen by the theory taking as given semantic and intentional notions such as those of "asserting that...", "expressing the thought that..." and "saying that..." that are employed in giving its explanations regarding what the meanings of particular items consist in.

This is how the first two parts of a meaning-theory, the core and the shell, which collapse on McDowell's account, are related to the general questions raised in the philosophy of language. The core of a meaning-theory is directly related to actual speakers of the language and explains what it is to possess particular concepts/grasp particular thoughts of the language but only in terms of a semantic/intentional notion of use which concerns the very concept/thought that the explanation is concerned with explaining possession of. Confirmation of the entire meaning-theory as being correct is achieved by locating it within the broader project of making best sense of speakers' behaviour and psychological states, and it is by locating the meaning-theory within this broader project that we shed light on the general concepts of meaning and linguistic competence in a non-reductive fashion. This is where we saw the usefulness of heterophonic meaning-theories gain their value for McDowell. We can say that modesty is concerned with a type of conceptual geography, in the sense that it is concerned with mapping out the relations between such concepts that the philosophy of language finds, initially at least, problematic and hopes to elucidate, i.e. the concepts of belief, meaning, competence, truth, assertion, etc. We are to do this by not depriving ourselves of a presupposed understanding of such notions but by locating them within the broader anthropological account.

3.2. Dummett on the Shape of Truth-Conditional Meaning-Theories

Dummett's primary aim, on the other hand, is not to map the conceptual links between these main concepts, and so he does not want to engage in the type of non-reductive conceptual geography that McDowell seeks. Instead he wants to provide non-trivial explanations about in virtue of what particular items of the language mean what they do and what it is to be competent with those items. It is this requirement that constitutes whether a meaning-theory is full-blooded or not. Dummett also wants to reduce the central

concepts to those of a lower conceptual level; i.e. non-semantic, non-intentional notions that are in some sense less problematic, more readily available and more open to view in his eyes. This aspiration for a meaning-theory to be reductionist is a desire for a meaning-theory to be “maximally” full-blooded:

The most urgent task that philosophers are now called upon to carry out is to devise what I have been called [*sic*] a “systematic theory of meaning” [a meaning-theory], that is to say, a systematic account of the functioning of language which does not beg any questions by presupposing as already understood any semantic concepts, even such familiar ones as those of truth and of assertion (Dummett, 1975b, p. 454).

It is because Dummett wants a meaning-theory to achieve the aim of non-triviality, and explain truth and meaning together, that he thinks there is an incompatibility between the truth-conditional conception of meaning and a minimalist conception of truth. In order to understand Dummett’s incompatibility claim we must, then, understand what it is for a meaning-theory to be full-blooded and maximally full-blooded. The current section will provide such an understanding by following Dummett’s dialectic of assuming the truth-conditional conception as being the default position, and outline what it is for a truth-conditional theory to be maximally full-blooded for Dummett.

Since the disagreement regarding the incompatibility is based on the issue as to whether a meaning-theory should be modest or full-blooded, it is one that essentially concerns our philosophical ambitions in the philosophy of language and the role that a meaning-theory is then understood to take in response to the answers that are thought to be afforded in this area of investigation. Dummett considers his reductive position as aiming to provide as much illumination to the central concepts as possible by defining them in terms of notions that can be understood independently from the semantic and intentional (Dummett, 2007, p. 378). Although Dummett agrees with McDowell that the notions of truth, meaning, assertion, etc. are so interconnected that we must explain them all together, the strategy is to start from a position below them all and work our way up to them. This is in contrast to McDowell’s approach which starts from a position in the midst of such notions and is one of conceptual geography. The aim of McDowell’s quietist reading of the Davidsonian methodology is to not say anything distinctly new, in the sense that it consists of assembling reminders of what we already know. Dummett also expresses thoughts of a

similar nature by seemingly echoing Wittgenstein's comments at §109 of the *Investigations*. His understanding of them must be radically different to McDowell's though; "philosophy is indeed concerned with reality, but not to discover new facts about it: it seeks to improve our understanding of what we already know. It does not seek to observe more, but to clarify our version of what we see" (Dummett, 2010, p. 10). How we clarify what we already know for Dummett is by providing a revealing analysis of the central concepts by using notions that are sufficiently remote from them. It does not consist of tracing the conceptual links between such concepts which, for that purpose, can be taken as already given.

Given this general strategy, and working on the assumption that the truth-conditional conception is the right sort of account for a meaning-theory to embody, the way that Dummett sees the structure of a meaning-theory is as follows. The core of the theory specifies the truth-conditions of every indicative sentence of the language, and is thought of as providing the correct semantics of the language in a compositional manner. In this respect, we can follow the general assumption that it will take the form of a Tarskian truth theory for a language. The shell is thought of as being entirely distinct from the core, and aims to provide non-trivial explanations regarding what it is for particular items of the language to have the meanings they do and what it is for speakers to be competent with those items. This is achieved by the shell spelling out in virtue of what particular items have the meaning they do in terms that do not concern the particular concept or thought that *that* item expresses. At the ground level, we would also need to do this in a way in which the facts that we appeal to are described in non-semantic, non-intentional terms as well.

Since the meaning-theory would ultimately show, in non-semantic, non-intentional terms, what it is for items of the language to mean what they do, the account would provide a reductive account of the general concept of meaning. This is how Dummett sees a meaning-theory as being related to the main concepts that belong to the philosophy of language that I have cited, and it is how overall illumination is achieved for him by following the methodological approach derived from Davidson. Reflecting on a meaning-theory is designed to give us a reductive analysis of the concept meaning, as opposed to using notions concerned with meaningfulness within a meaning-theory and shedding light on this general concept by tracing the conceptual links between it and related ones within a

broader anthropological project. McDowell puts the thoughts that I have been expressing in the above section succinctly, by saying:

Dummett's conviction is that a properly illuminating account of a language must describe what is in fact a practice of thought-expression, but in other terms; then we can say that the description spells out what it is in virtue of which the practice is the practice of thought-expression that it is. Philosophy demands an account of the practice of speaking a language that displays its character as linguistic, but is given from outside the idea of giving linguistic expression to thoughts (McDowell, 1997, p. 111).¹³

Once the core and shell is in place, together they form Part 1 of a meaning-theory with Part 2 being the theory of force, which will have several substantial jobs to perform. Since Dummett cannot read the truth-conditions issued by the core as already being correct specifications of the content of assertions and the like, on that conception of truth-conditions which is fixed by McDowell's truistic observation between the concept of truth and the content of an assertion, Dummett's demand for full-bloodedness dramatically impacts how we are to conceive the nature of the theory of force. One of its tasks will be to explain how the content of an assertion, a question, a command, etc. can be derived from some uniform principles regarding that speech-act and the truth-conditions of an arbitrary sentence that could be used to make that speech act (Dummett, 1976, p. 40). The theory of force will therefore have to allow us to make transitions from "sub-surface" material which is given in Part 1 and does not yet see specifications of truth-conditions as already being specifications of content of assertions, and does not use semantic and intentional notions like that of assertion, to a point at which such notions and content materialise at the "surface" in terms of the notion that is taken as central in the core. There is a requirement, then, that the core and shell should be set up before bringing in notions such as those of the content of an assertion, which will instead be seen as belonging entirely to the theory of force (McDowell, 1987, p. 89). As Dummett says, regarding the case of counterfactual sentences:

¹³ Dummett comes close to expressing his position in exactly these terms himself. When talking about the commonality between the aims of later Wittgenstein and Frege, Dummett tells us that; "both are agreed that what is required is a description of the conventional principles which govern the *practice* of speaking the language, a description which does not invoke the notion of a sentence's expressing a thought, but, rather, displays that which renders any given sentence the expression of a particular thought" (Dummett, 1975b, p. 446). It is clear in what Dummett has to say in that paper that not only is this his reading of the aims of later Wittgenstein and Frege, but that it is one he endorses and shares with them.

...the theory of force – the supplementary part of the theory of meaning which determines, from the truth-conditions of a sentence, the content of an utterance of that sentence when endowed with assertoric (or other specific types of) force – must enable us to derive from the truth-conditions of the counterfactual, as specified by the theory of truth, the content of an assertion made by uttering it (Dummett, 1976, p. 65).

Part 1 of the meaning-theory therefore concerns *particular* items of the language. The core specifies the semantics of the language, and the shell correlates *specific* explanations to the axioms/theorems issued by the core regarding questions about what their meanings consist in and what it is for speakers to be competent with those items. The theory of force is then being seen as comprising a set of *general* principles, which will to a large extent be invariant from language to language, stated in terms of the central notion from the core (truth) by means of which Dummett's desired sub-surface readings of use given in Part 1 are systematically connected and related to the facts given at the level of content. Part 2 shows how the content of an assertion can be derived and determined by means of some general uniform principles regarding that speech-act from the truth-condition of an arbitrary sentence that could be used to make that speech act. Dummett often calls the theory of force "supplementary", but this is misleading and underplays the significance that this part of the meaning-theory plays. Indeed, in other work, he cites it as being the "most important ingredient in a meaning-theory" (Dummett, 1991, p. 114). The theory has far more to do than simply allowing us to identify linguistic actions as performances of specific speech-acts of specified types, and allow us to pair a suitable indicative sentence that gives the content of a speech act for the case of an utterance of a non-indicative sentence, as would be the case in McDowell's theory. For McDowell, there is obviously no need for the theory of force to do anything like what Dummett asks of it. From the off, the specifications of truth-conditions that the meaning-theory issues just are correct specifications of what would be asserted in an assertoric use of the languages' indicative sentences, and so there is no need for the theory of force to relate anything read in sub-surface terms to the level of content. Everything is already given in terms of facts and descriptions given in contentful terms such as what someone is doing on a particular occasion is asserting that snow is white.

3.3. The Theory of Force

Having now got a general idea of the shape of Dummett's meaning-theory that embodies the truth-conditional approach, I turn to how he establishes the need for the theory of force to connect the sub-surface material in Part 1 (material which is read without presupposing semantic and intentional notions) to the level of content within Part 2 of his account. This will allow us to further see the gulf between Dummett and McDowell and how their disagreement is not confined to the form that the shell of a meaning-theory should take. It will also provide an appropriate setting to bring in Dummett's distinction between what is said and the point of saying it which will be needed later in 5.2 when I consider a possible Dummettian reply to the criticisms I make of a reductive meaning-theory.

The need for the theory to do what Dummett asks of it is established by an analogy with a group of Martians encountering human language for the first time (Dummett, 1973a, pp. 295–296). In this analogy, Dummett supposes that some Martians observe human beings and one of the activities they observe is our use of language. The Martians have a method of communicating with one another that is so unlike human language that they do not recognise that what human beings are doing is also a method of communication as well, but they want to come to understand what we are doing by constructing a theory of it. The Martians do this by constructing a theory that systematically determines the conditions for the application of a certain predicate to sentences of the human's language. The predicate is coextensive with our "is true", and so their theory is analogous to Dummett's reading of Part 1 of a truth-conditional meaning-theory. So far, however, the predicate only has a formal significance, in that it systematically applies to sentences of the language as determined by the theory in accordance with certain rules. Because the practice they are observing is so alien to them, the Martians have no idea of any significance this predicate has, other than that it applies to a certain abstract object, and so they bring to bear no prior understanding of the predicate, or of notions that it is intimately bound up with such as that sentences are used to express thoughts or make assertions, etc., in their attempt to comprehend what humans are doing in the activity they are observing:

...if we suppose that the Martians understand the significance of assigning truth-values to sentences otherwise than as the assignment of them to arbitrarily labelled categories in accordance with certain rules, we are crediting them with a prior knowledge of some activity akin to human language. They would have to

already know what “true” and “false” meant, presumably in connection with something which they used as an instrument in communication. In that case, we should have smuggled into the account of our language in terms of sense and reference an element external to it... [I]t should be possible to describe the activity of using language without presupposing that it is already known what significance it has to call one class of sentences the class of “true” sentences and the other the class of “false” sentences; this feature, to be expressly described, is not contained in the characterisation of our language in terms of sense and reference (Dummett, 1973a, p. 297).

Here, Dummett makes a point that he has consistently pressed since his very first publication, “Truth” (1959), to his very last on these issues, that the core of a meaning-theory which consists in a specification of truth-conditions will only allow us to understand utterances of native speakers of the target language if we bring to bear a prior understanding of the significance of the truth-predicate, and how the conditions for sentences to be true relates to their content (i.e. how truth and meaning bear upon each other, as he sometimes puts it). The core of the meaning-theory, which simply stipulates the application of the truth-predicate to sentences of the language, does not supply us with the required understanding of the significance of the truth-predicate either, since it only provides us with a complex procedure for assigning a certain predicate to sentences of the language, based upon certain rules which govern the assignment of certain objects or properties to component words; the theory merely specifies the extension of the concept. If we did not already understand the significance of applying the truth-predicate and the concept of truth, and so did not already have a conception of sentences being usable to make assertions, then it would be entirely mysterious what might be meant in taking a theory to systematically determine the application of some predicate to these abstract objects (McDowell, 2007, p. 354). However, Dummett’s demand for reductionism means that we cannot take it as already known any semantic and intentional concepts within Part 1 of the theory. Instead such concepts have to come into view from sub-surface material within Part 2 of the theory. Since we are supposing that the Martians abide by this restriction by not bringing to bear a prior understanding of the truth-predicate, their account is, so far at least, analogous to how Dummett reads Part 1 of a meaning-theory. This means that the Martians, do not, as yet, see what human beings as doing in uttering a sentence on a particular occasion as being (the Martian equivalent of) asserting that something or other is the case.

The Martians theory is therefore a long way off from being an adequate theory of human language. Although they have their own method of communication, their theory of human language so far does not yield the requisite understanding to the Martians, for they do not yet understand that the practice that they are observing is a practice of making assertions and is also a method of communication as well. What the Martians need is something analogous to Part 2 of a meaning theory – a theory of force. This would allow them to move from material given in their initial theory that is capable of being set-up without seeing the application of a certain predicate to sentences of human’s language as already being specifications of the contents of assertions, to a place where this becomes comprehensible to them. Given this understanding, the Martians would now see that what human beings are doing is making assertions and communicating with one another. Again, the end point should be that they can work their way up to this understanding without them presupposing that they already recognise what humans beings are doing, and so without drawing upon a prior understanding of semantic and intentional notions in coming to their comprehension of the activity.¹⁴ This is to be achieved by providing an explanation of the various types of speech-acts that human beings can effect by uttering sentences, explanations that make human practices of asserting, commanding, questioning, etc. comprehensible to them, and in doing so employ the central notion of the initial theory so that it acquires a more than merely formal significance from the use to which it is put in the Martian’s equivalent of the theory of force. This would allow them to see why its application is so central and important to understanding the activity they are observing (McDowell, 1981, p. 325):

...we shall have succeeded in our task only if the account that we finally construct is one that, if it could be conveyed to them, would satisfy the Martians; and that requires that it should not employ concepts that are intelligible only to those who already have a language comparable to ours (Dummett, 2006, p. 37-38).

Although Dummett divides the meaning-theory into Part 1 and 2, they have to form an interlocking whole in order to yield the required understanding, even if Part 1 cannot draw upon notions that are thought of as belonging to the theory of force. For it is in the

¹⁴ Also see (Dummett, 1973a, p. 681) for a similar comment that McDowell (McDowell, 1981) highlights.

theory of force that Dummett thinks we will, in the end, be provided with a general reductive explanation of the concepts he hopes to analyse. If the theory of force could explain how the content of an utterance with a specific force, assertoric say, can be derived from some general uniform principles regarding that speech act and the truth-condition of an arbitrary sentence, without presupposing familiarity with the practice of assertion and without already reading specifications of truth-conditions as being specifications of content, as Dummett's Martians have to, then the theory of force would show how the notions of content and assertion (and other notions that are related to utterances of differing forces) are recoverable/constructible from some general uniform principles regarding material given in Part 1 and elements specific to the type of speech act effected; material and principles which do not presuppose familiarity with such notions and practices. It is because the general principles encompassed in the theory of force will be to a large extent invariant from language to language which accounts for the independence of the notions constructed there from the particular language under study, but instead concern language, and meaning, in general.

On Dummett's reading of the truth-conditional conception, it is by using the concept of truth in the theory of force to explain how the content of an utterance with a specific force can be derived from some general principles that he thinks the notion will gain its content and significance (Dummett, 2006, pp. 51-52). It is in this part of the theory that we will be provided with an explanation of what truth is as well (Dummett, 1991, p. 54). What was missing in the initial Martian theory as an account of truth was the significance of the truth-predicate as it relates to the content of an utterance, but the theory of force aims to uncover this and so can be said to provide us with what was missing. In displaying the connection between the application of the truth-predicate to an arbitrary sentence and its content in terms of some general principles, it will "embody those principles relating to the concept of truth which someone would have to grasp if he were to be able to derive the use of a sentence from a specification of the condition for it to be true" (Dummett, 1976, p. 40). In doing so the theory would not only explain what assertions, questions, commands, etc. are, and how the content of such speech-acts are determined, but would also be said to explain what truth is.

Since Dummett sees meaning-theories that embody the truth-conditional conception as taking the notion of truth as being the central concept of the theory, and he prevents such accounts from bringing to bear a prior understanding of the significance of the truth-predicate, the only way that proponents of such accounts can explain what truth is in a way that is acceptable to Dummett is by using it to derive the content of utterances non-trivially and reconstructing the central concepts within the theory of force. In this case, its content is wholly determined by its role in the theory (Dummett, 1987a, p. 259). Dummett does not, therefore, violate McDowell's insistence that there is no recognisable notion of truth that can be understood independently of meaning (of sentences being usable to make assertions, etc.). If the Martians were to carry out constructing their equivalent of the theory of force, they would come to an explanation of what truth is at the same time as providing an account of the practice of assertion, and so at the same time as seeing that what human beings are doing in uttering a sentence is an instance of asserting that something or other is the case.

That truth-conditional accounts are debarred from bringing to bear a prior understanding of truth and the significance of truth-predicate is something that Dummett has often used to criticise traditional defences of such accounts. The main target of these criticisms was Davidson (Dummett, 1989, p. 178), who commits the opposite error to that made by classical correspondence theorists and coherence theorists in his early work. The correspondence theorist wants to explain the predicate "is true" as it applies to propositions, as propositions are taken as being the primary bearers of truth and falsity and not token sentences, and what proposition a sentence expresses depends upon the sentences meaning. In wanting to explain what it is for any given proposition to be true, rather than explaining what it is for a token utterance of a given sentence to be true, the theory would have to assume that the meanings of sentences (what propositions sentences express) can be given to them in advance of determining the conditions for them to be true, and so assume that we can explain the concept of meaning in advance of understanding how the concept of truth applies to sentences of the language. Likewise, traditional coherence theorists commit a similar mistake in making propositions the primary truth-bearers and taking the truth of a proposition as consisting in its coherence with some overall system of propositions. Dummett's point that correspondence and coherence theories fail to appreciate the fact that

truth and meaning are so intimately bound up together that we can only explain them together within a meaning-theory seems right, and that it is a genuine mistake to think we can do otherwise is also correct.

Davidson commits the opposite mistake to the traditional correspondence and coherence theorists, since he thought that it is by taking the concept of truth as already understood that we can then analyse or reconstruct the concept of meaning in terms of it. That is, Davidson saw himself as turning the explanatory strategy of a Tarskian truth-definition on its head (Davidson, 1984, p. xvi). Instead of defining the property of being true as it applies to sentences of the object language by taking the meanings of those sentences as antecedently understood by appealing to notion of sameness of meaning or translation in the adequacy condition of Convention T, Davidson took the concept of truth as being the one central primitive. He then explained the meanings of the sentences of the language by laying down when utterances made by them are true, and attempted to impose enough formal structure to rule out rogue, incorrect T-sentences. Dummett bemoans the lack of a satisfactory explanation regarding the connection between truth and content, because by assuming a prior understanding of the notion of truth in explaining meaning, what Davidson was seen as presupposing was precisely the manner in which the truth-conditions of a sentence go towards determining its content. Dummett then demands that Davidson explain that which he is presupposing an understanding of in order to yield an acceptable explanation of the connection between truth and meaning. It is therefore only by explaining truth and meaning together within a meaning-theory that Dummett thinks any satisfactory account of their relationship is achieved.

Aside from being able to reconstruct the central concepts and content, the theory of force will also have to be able to identify the mood of sentences of the language since the core of the theory only specifies the truth-conditions of every indicative sentence of the language. Presumably the identification will be made based upon their syntactic structure for Dummett (inflection of the main verb, word-order in the main clause, he tells us), much like McDowell's theory would have to, so that the theory would be able to pair a suitable indicative sentence to utterances of non-indicative sentences that bear a systematic syntactic relation to one another. This would then allow us to provide specifications of truth-conditions to utterances of the latter kind of sentences that we would not usually say an

utterance of would constitute saying something that could be true or false. For Dummett, what it is for an utterance to have a specific force (what it is to make an assertion, say) is determined by the conventions governing the use of sentences in given moods, and not by the intentions of the speaker. The theory of force would then have to encompass an explanation of how the truth-condition of an arbitrary sentence relates to the force an utterance of it would have, according to the rules or conventions governing the mood of the sentence (Dummett, 1976, p. 39). However, the connection between force and mood is not straightforward, since there are insufficiently many syntactic forms that differentiate the many types of speech acts that can be effected in language. For example, imperatives may be used to issue commands, make requests, make offers, give instructions or offer advice, to give an incomplete list (Dummett, 1991a, p. 115). If all these acts are differentiated by the meaning-theory as being distinct speech acts that can be effected by imperatives, then the difference between the number of syntactic forms and speech acts in the language is very great. Mood does not, therefore, determine what it is to attach a specific force to an utterance, but force is determined by conventional uses being made of sentences in given moods.

Dummett's denial that the intentions of the speaker determine what it is to attach a particular force to an utterance is predicated on the fact that if intentions did play the central role, rather than being determined by convention and rule-governed practices, then this would prevent a meaning-theory from providing any sort of systematic account of how the force of an utterance is determined from some uniform principles governing the practice that concerns that speech act. Dummett suggests that an account of force would then have to be relegated to an account of the general procedure of divining someone else's intentions (Dummett, 1985b, p. 211). If force is considered as part of what is said by a speaker, and we see intentions as being what matters with regards to force, then the significance of an utterance, and so linguistic meaning, will always be in part a product of speakers' particular intentions, purposes, aims, etc. Dummett's general strategy of reconstructing a range of concepts that relate to meaning, and connecting his sub-surface readings to content level, within the theory of force of a meaning-theory would be largely undermined if intentions were given priority. That is, the theory of force would not be able to do what Dummett asks of it.

Although the force of an utterance is determined by conventions governing the mood of sentences, this does not mean that the intentions of the speaker play no role when it comes to making sense of what speech act someone is effecting, with Dummett making a distinction between *what* is said and the *point* of saying it. What is said, which includes the speech act performed, is determined by the conventions governing the practice that concerns that particular speech act, but the point of making an utterance, why a speaker said what they said on a particular occasion, will rely on their intentions and purposes at the time. For example, if the chair of a conference, at quarter to four, says to a lecturer giving a talk, "Several people have to leave at four", then, although he is making an assertion using an indicative sentence, the point of his utterance is that the lecturer should bring his talk to a close. The chair's intention is that the talk should finish promptly, and this underlies the point of saying what he did, but this intention does not mean that he used an indicative to make a request to the lecturer. If the lecturer failed to realise that he should finish his talk soon, then this is because he failed to understand the point of the chair's utterance, rather than failing to understand what was said to him (Dummett, 1991a, p. 118).

The distinction between what is said and the point of saying it is not clear cut, and there will be borderline cases that the theory of force might have to demarcate, irony for example, but Dummett looks to be right in saying that some distinction can be drawn here, and it allows him to say that though the intentions of the speaker play no part in determining what it is to attach a particular force to an utterance, they do play a role in how we recognise whether an utterance carry's a specific force; they can be used to select between ambiguous meanings and ambiguous forces attached to utterances. A meaning-theory must encompass an explanation of what is said, but it will not provide an explanation of the process of estimating the point of utterances since comprehending the point of what is said comprises nothing that is special to language as such, since we make sense of other people's intentions, purposes, aims and motives underlying their linguistic behaviour in the same sort of way that we make sense of their non-linguistic behaviour and actions in general. A meaning-theory must, however, deliver something that allows room for this process to take place.

The ambiguity that can arise with force is the same sort of ambiguity that we encounter with ambiguity in meaning and what is said in general (e.g. "bank" can be used to

mean either the riverside or a financial institution, and whether a speaker is using the word to refer to one or the other place is determined by their intentions, purposes and aims at the time. If the speaker is talking about wanting to cash a cheque at the time of his utterance of “I’m going to the bank”, then their intentions and aims help us recognise that they are referring to the financial institution. But what it is for the word “bank” to refer to a financial institution is in no way determined by a speaker’s intentions, but is explained via the conventional public use this word has in the language). Dummett provides the example of “Can you speak French?” which is ambiguous between a question and a request (Dummett, 1985b, p. 213–214 and 1991a, pp. 118–119). A speaker might use this sentence to ask a friend whether they had picked up the language while living in France for a period of time, or they could use the sentence to request that the speaker speak in French to them. In making sense of what speech act someone is effecting, we would have to understand their intention in saying what they said; “this intention *selects* between two existing linguistic practices but *creates* neither of them” (Dummett, 1991, p. 119).

The above is a general sketch of the theory of force on Dummett’s reading of a meaning-theory based upon the truth-conditional approach. However, Dummett admits that, “so far, we have very little conception of what such a supplementary theory [theory of force], formulated without appeal to a prior understanding of notions, such as assertion, relating to linguistic behaviour, would look like” (Dummett, 1976, p. 41). That is, as yet, he is unsure as to how a theory of force could do what he asks of it on this sketch; how it could relate sub-surface readings of use to the level of content in an informative way that did not appeal to semantic and intentional notions. This is, however, by the bye for Dummett, since, as we will see in chapter 5, he thinks a maximally full-blooded theory *must* be possible to provide. Although he does not, as yet, know how the descriptions given by such a theory are to be systematically related to content and to the semantic and intentional, the possibility of doing so must be available, it is just extremely difficult to see how it can be done at this stage. That his dialectic is set up in such a way that he is explicitly considering the truth-conditional approach to meaning, and then claiming he has no idea how such theories can do what he asks of them in the theory of force, is not a criticism that Dummett raises regarding such accounts. As we will see in chapter 4, given maximal full-bloodedness, Dummett’s own preferred account will have to comprise an equally substantial theory of

force. It is just as hard to see how that theory could systematically relate what is given in Part 1 to the level of content as it is on the truth-conditional account.

3.4. The Incompatibility Stated

Given that McDowell's modesty and Dummett's full-bloodedness have now been outlined, we are at an appropriate stage to consider Dummett's claim that the truth-conditional conception of meaning is incompatible with a minimalist conception of truth. Dummett's argument crucially depends upon two assumptions; that a meaning-theory should be full-blooded by providing non-trivial explanations about in virtue of what particular items mean what they do and what it is to be competent with those items, and secondly, that truth and meaning should be explained together. In the previous chapter we saw that McDowell justifies his interest in truth-conditions by citing a truistic connection between truth and assertoric content:

The basis of the truth-conditional conception of meaning, as I see it, is the following thought: to specify what would be asserted, in the assertoric utterance of a sentence apt for such use, is to specify a condition under which the sentence (as thus uttered) would be true. The truth-conditional conception of meaning embodies a conception of truth that makes that thought truistic. (I am inclined to think it is the only philosophically hygienic conception of truth there is.) The truism captures what is right about the idea that "...is true", said of a sentence, functions as a device of disquotation, or, more generally, of cancellation of semantic ascent (McDowell, 1987, pp. 88-89).

The truism that McDowell cites is also one that he claims might capture the intuition that finds its expression in the redundancy theory of truth (McDowell, 1987, p. 90). However, McDowell is not a redundancy *theorist* or a minimalist *theorist* concerning truth. He does not think that truth is not a property or that "is true" is redundant, and he does not think that we can offer an explanation about the concept of meaning without recourse to the notion of truth and then explain what truth is in terms of meaning. Instead truth is one concept, among many, that is centrally important in a philosophical reflection about the relation of meaning and language to reality (McDowell, 2005a, p. 87). What McDowell says is that his truism, which he also cites under the heading of an identity theory¹⁵ of truth in some places, an odd name for a truism as he admits, could be said to capture the *intuition*

¹⁵ "Identity conception" is probably more appropriate.

that finds its expression in the redundancy theory of truth. That is, it captures an initial platitudinous thought that might lead us down the (misguided) path towards a full-blown redundancy theory concerning truth, but the thought does not, in itself, constitute such a theory. Nor does it constitute any *theory* concerning truth. The thought expressed is a mere truism after all, and we would hardly call something a philosophical theory concerning a subject matter if all it does is restrict itself to truisms as McDowell intends, but offers no explanation regarding them or tell us something we did not already know about the concept. This is something McDowell is entirely comfortable with given his quietist stance, where description is preferred over philosophical theses, and the point of stating the truism is to primarily ward off temptations that might lead to misguided positions concerning truth. It is legitimate, however, to label McDowell's views on truth under the heading of being a minimalist *conception* of truth, a heading which a number of positions would fall under including the redundancy and minimalist theories proper, if what is meant here is that he sets his face against substantive and inflationist theorising about the concept, the classic case of inflationist theorising being embodied in the correspondence theory of truth. McDowell's position restricts itself to truisms in explicating the concept while helping himself to the notion of meaning or content via the "that *p*" construction (cf. McDowell, 2005a, p. 87).

To my mind, it is fairly straightforward to establish the claim that a truth-conditional meaning-theory is incompatible with a redundancy theory or minimalist theory of truth, which is something that Dummett has long maintained (Dummett, 1959). The redundancy theorist claims "it is true that *p*" is simply equivalent to "that *p*". This is the thought that might be said to be entailed from the truism that McDowell cites, that if one asserts that *p*, then what one asserts is true if *p*, false if $\sim p$. The redundancy theory goes beyond the truistic thought that McDowell cites, however, in adding that predication of truth is eliminable in this case because truth is not a substantive notion at all. Instead the whole explanation of the notion of truth is (all but) given by the equivalence. If the whole explanation of the notion of truth is given by the equivalence, then that can only be because we already have an antecedent grasp of that to which the notion is said to apply to. We must, therefore, antecedently understand what it is for an assertion to be an assertion that *p*. Obviously this means that we cannot, without circularity, then take the truth of an assertion to explain what

it is for an assertion to be an assertion that p . The circle is simply too tight here to explain anything.

Taking Paul Horwich's (1998) position on truth as being one that marks out a theory as being minimalist, the minimalist diverges from the redundancy theorist in that the latter holds that truth is a redundant concept, whereas the former states that though truth is a trivial concept and is of little philosophical importance, it is not redundant because (following W.V.O. Quine) the truth-predicate is not eliminable in every context but plays a role that enables us to capture certain generalisations (e.g. "Everything Dan says is true"). Nevertheless, a minimalist theorist is still unable to combine his position regarding truth with a truth-conditional meaning-theory for similar reasons to the redundancy theorist, since the minimalist holds that the concept of truth is exhausted by the schema "it is true that p if and only if p ". This is something that Horwich recognises, and in response proposes an account of meaning that attempts to eschew any appeal to the notion of truth, with truth then being explained only at the end in terms of the cited schema.

Truth cannot, then, be explained entirely by an equivalence of some variety that is said to exhaust its content on truth-conditional accounts. Instead truth and meaning can only be explained together in a single account. McDowell, as we've seen, respects these thoughts from Dummett. The truism that he cites regarding truth does not exhaust its content, and truth and meaning are indeed explained together, or, more accurately, the problems that concern them are meant to be dispelled, within a meaning-theory. What McDowell draws from this is that an explanation of the concept of meaning cannot be given in terms of a prior understanding of the concept of truth, and the concept of truth cannot be explained in terms of a prior understanding of the concept of meaning. There is no priority here; light is shed on both concepts by tracing the conceptual links between them and related notions within a broader anthropological account, an account that is missing with both redundancy and minimalist theories proper (cf. Hornsby, 1997, p. 17). There is, then, no independent purchase on the notion of truth from that of meaning and no independent purchase on the notion of meaning from that of truth.

However, Dummett's demand regarding full-bloodedness still entails that McDowell's position is not viable. That is, that a truth-conditional account of meaning cannot be combined with a minimalist *conception* of truth given full-bloodedness and the

interconnectedness of truth and meaning, even when the equivalence is not taken as exhausting truth's content:

An account of truth which is formulated in a given language presupposes, on the face of it, an understanding of that language. On the other hand, if truth is to be made the central notion of a theory of meaning for a language, that is, grasp of the meaning of a sentence of that language is to be taken as consisting in a knowledge of the condition for it be true, then, in a sense, the notion of truth must be prior to any understanding of that language. Hence, so far from its being essential that a truth-definition be given in a metalanguage which is an expansion of the object-language, in order that instances of the equivalence thesis be derivable, there appears to be conflict between the invocation of a truth-definition of this kind and the use of the notion of truth as central to the [meaning-theory], even when it is not claimed that the truth-definition *exhausts* the meaning of the word "true". Rather, it appears that a truth-definition of this sort can serve the purpose only of explaining the use of the word "true" *within* the language, instead of the more ambitious purpose of giving a [meaning-theory] of the language (Dummett, 1973a, p. 460).

What Dummett is arguing here is that it is essential in understanding how McDowell's truistic connection between truth and assertoric content captures the content of the concept of truth that we are able to understand what sentences of the language can be used to assert. The notion of a particular sentence meaning what it does is taken as given in this elucidation of the concept of truth. It is in this sense that McDowell's account of truth is "formulated within a given language", for it presupposes facts that are overtly available only to those who already have a competence of the target language when characterising its conception of truth. This, Dummett says, means there is a conflict between such an understanding of truth and the truth-conditional conception, even when it is not claimed, against the minimalist theorist, that such a connection exhausts truth's content. The reason for this is that a combination of these positions will result in a meaning-theory that can only provide trivial explanations about in virtue of what particular items mean what they do and what it is to be competent with those items when that conception of truth is taken as central to understanding meaning. This results from the fact that such an account would help itself to a presupposed understanding of a competence of the target language in elucidating its conceptions of truth and meaning and the connection between them.

McDowell tells us that:

Dummett will not allow a proponent of the truth-conditional approach to meaning to characterise truth as what a thought enjoys when things are as one says they are if one gives expression to the thought... This reflects the fact the he imposes on the truth-conditional approach his rule about what concepts a meaning theory may "take as given". It follows that the truth-conditional approach needs a conception of truth explicable from outside concepts only language speakers can have, in particular the concept of saying that things are thus and so. What might seem to fit the bill is a certain kind of correspondence theory of truth, in which truth is supposedly explained in terms of correspondence to "states of affairs", with the idea of states of affairs supposedly explicable independently of the idea of capacities to give expression to thoughts. (A very peculiar notion of states of affairs.) But for all the capacity to fascinate philosophers, the correspondence idea in that form yields nothing genuinely recognizable as a conception of truth... Aristotle's formulation makes vivid how the concept of truth – the only one we really understand – comes together with, not in advance of, the concept of saying that things are thus and so (McDowell, 2007, p. 362).

However, this is not an entirely accurate summary of Dummett's argument.

Dummett *is* willing to allow the truth-conditional proponent to characterise truth as what a thought enjoys when things are as one asserts them to be. The connection that McDowell cites between truth and assertoric content is, after all, a truism. What Dummett is not willing to allow is that the conception of truth that the truism captures plays a central role in a meaning-theory, for that would render it modest. A meaning-theory must win through to this conception of truth, as it were, at the end of its story. For if a meaning-theory could achieve non-triviality, then it will provide a substantial understanding of what it is to assert that *p* in the language. Given such an understanding, the account could then introduce a conception of truth as characterised within that language. Dummett is still willing to allow, at this juncture, the truth-conditional conception to be the default position. However, this would require taking the concept of truth as being prior to an understanding of the target language by not first characterising truth in terms of a presupposed understanding of that language so as to hold out for non-triviality. Instead the content of truth would be given by using the concept in that account in a manner similar to that outlined in section 3.3. This would be an explanatory strategy similar, though of course not identical, to Horwich's. Horwich proposes an account of meaning that attempts to eschew any appeal to the concept of truth, with truth then being explained only at the end in terms of his "Schema E". This strategy is forced upon him because of how he thinks of truth. On the current explanatory

strategy that Dummett thinks is imposed on the truth-conditional conception, an account of meaning would be given in terms of the concept of truth, but a conception of truth not characterised in terms of a competence of the target language. Once an account of meaning is given, then giving truth a word within that language can be achieved at the end by citing McDowell's truism regarding truth and assertoric content. This would then allow us to hold on to a truth-conditional meaning-theory and a minimalist conception of truth. The incompatibility only arises for Dummett when trying to make a minimalist conception of truth central to an understanding of meaning, and vice versa.

McDowell also says that Dummett's demand imposes upon truth-conditional accounts the requirement that we must explain truth outside of the semantic and intentional, and in particular without helping ourselves to the "that *p*" construction. He then sees Dummett as perhaps saddling this conception of meaning with a correspondence theory of truth where the notion of a fact can be separated from the notion of content, with facts then playing a truth-maker role.¹⁶ It might indeed be the case that Dummett's ultimate desire is to reduce the concepts of truth and meaning to non-semantic, non-intentional ones. Whether it is in Dummett's thinking that this forces truth-conditional accounts to advance a correspondence theory of truth seems doubtful, given my outline of how Dummett thinks the concept of truth is explained within the theory of force on the truth-conditional conception in 3.3. Nevertheless, what is right is that Dummett does want meaning-theories that embody this conception of meaning to say something more regarding truth than what is given by minimalist conceptions which restrict themselves to truisms and platitudes, and, importantly, simply help themselves to the "that *p*" construction in explicating the concept.

3.5. Conclusion

Dummett's claim of an incompatibility between the truth-conditional conception of meaning and a minimalist conception of truth is predicated on his desire for a meaning-theory to be full-blooded and for truth and meaning to be explained together within a meaning-theory. A

¹⁶ Also see (McDowell, 1987, p. 92) for a similar comment regarding the correspondence theory of truth and Dummett's demands. Indeed McDowell is stronger here, for he says, not that the correspondence theory "might seem to fit the bill", but that "it seems that Dummett's assumptions saddle adherents of the truth-conditional conception of meaning with the idea that truth consists in correspondence to such items – items in the world whose nature is intelligible 'as from outside' content" (McDowell, 1987, p. 92).

full-blooded theory aims to achieve non-trivial answers regarding the constitutive questions about the meanings and competency of items in a language, while a maximally full-blooded theory is one that is also reductionist in nature. The focus of this chapter has been primarily exegetical, in that I have outlined the requirement of full-bloodedness and how adherence to this requirement will mean that a minimalist conception of truth cannot play a role in a truth-conditional meaning-theory. The current chapter is also located within the narrative of the thesis in another respect in that, although McDowell does not establish the case for only providing trivial answers to the constitutive questions, reductionism in the philosophy of language should also be rejected. Non-triviality seems reasonable in light of the fact that we want to afford a greater amount of illumination to the central concepts than McDowell is willing to contemplate. However the requirement of reductionism seems dubious given the fact that the concepts that we hope to illuminate are some of the most central and fundamental concepts we have that concern our possession of rationality. By not allowing the use of such concepts when we attempt to characterise language-use and construct a meaning-theory, we will only ever fall into a position whereby what we have left is something that does not recognisably resemble the practice we are interested in. Given a differentiation between a theory which achieves non-triviality and one which is reductionist, what we should be aiming for is a full-blooded meaning-theory but not one which is “maximally” full-blooded in the way that Dummett desires. The next chapter will outline Dummett’s preferred meaning-theory which is maximally full-blooded and justificationist in nature, with the aim of criticising that account in chapter 5. This will then form the second part of my negative claim that neither Dummett nor McDowell are successful in establishing their strong contentions regarding the form that a meaning-theory should take.

Chapter 4

Towards a Dummettian Notion of Use

4.0. Introduction

Although McDowell is clear in his conception of the notion of use, it is far less clear how Dummett must be conceiving of that notion. The aim of this chapter is to lay the groundwork for finding a construal of the notion of use that would be acceptable for Dummett to achieve both non-triviality and reductionism within a meaning-theory. Achieving non-triviality for the vast majority of sentences within a language is connected to Dummett's commitment to a molecular meaning-theory. The chapter will therefore explain what it is for a meaning-theory to be molecular in nature in 4.1. Once his endorsement of molecularism has been provided, I turn to look at what notion of use would be appropriate for Dummett's maximally full-blooded account. It has to be one that is not construed in terms of causally conditioned behaviour, as this would be a behaviouristic reading of language, which is something that Dummett is keen to avoid.

I suggest in 4.2 that a middle level between the merely behaviouristic and the fully semantic and intentional might be seen in Wittgenstein's builder language-game. The builders have a practice that is describable in non-semantic, but ruled governed, normative terms. In this practice, the building assistant ought to bring a slab whenever he hears the appropriate call from the foreman, and, as the assistant carries out this action, he responds appropriately with some form of basic understanding in that he is aware that his behaviour "fits" the call he has heard. However, the practice of the builders is not one where concept possession and the central notions that concern the philosophy of language, which are bound up with rationality, are in view. It is unclear where the difference between the builders and language proper lies for Dummett, but it looks as though it consists in the fact

that the builders do not have an inferential structure in their practice which is present with full-blown language. Dummett's alternative meaning-theory to one that embodies the truth-conditional conception emphasises these ideas regarding inferential structure, with the theory taking either a "justificationist" or "pragmatist" form. Such accounts are briefly outlined in 4.3. Dummett's dialectic was to assume that the truth-conditional conception of meaning is the default position. This chapter brings that assumption to an end, but for ease of exposition I put Dummett's reasons for rejecting truth-conditional accounts to one side. Instead this chapter is primarily concerned with placing us in a more appropriate position to understand how Dummett must read the notion of use. A critical examination of his position will be given in chapter 5. This will form the second part of my contention that both Dummett and McDowell are unsuccessful in establishing their strong contentions regarding the form of a meaning theory; McDowell with his triviality and Dummett with his reductionism.

4.1. Molecularism

Dummett's desired meaning-theory will be one that is molecular in nature, as opposed to one that is atomistic or holistic. This entails that the practical capacities regarding speakers' competency that are correlated to the individual items of the language will be given at the level of the theorems of the theory, rather than at the axioms (Dummett, 1976, p. 38). Explanations regarding the meanings and competency of items at the level of the axioms will be achieved by derivation, in the sense that the axioms of a molecular account can only be understood in terms of how they figure in contributing to the possibilities for the use of whole sentences. An explanation regarding a speakers' competency of the words of a language will, then, be displayed in his employment of whole sentences (Dummett, 1976, p. 38). Dummett often explains molecularism by setting it against holism. Holism says that in order to understand any sentence of a language, a speaker must have a competency of the entire language. Molecularism, on the other hand, states that in order to understand a sentence of a language, a speaker must have a competency of some fragment of a language to which that sentence belongs. Such a fragment could, in principle, exist as a complete language in isolation, even though it would be impoverished and there would be much that could not be expressed within it. This is how Dummett understands Wittgenstein's observation (Wittgenstein, 2001, §199) that to understand a sentence is to understand a

language. It is not read as an advocating holism. Instead all it entails for Dummett is that a speaker must have a competency of a complete fragment of the language.

There are a number of distinct theses that Dummett draws out from this position.¹⁷ Following Gareth Evans (1982, pp. 100-105), one such thesis is the “generality constraint” which can be used to fill out Dummett’s notion of language “fragments”. What the generality constraint states is that in order to understand the sentence, say, “That ball is red”, a speaker must also understand a certain range of other sentences that surround that sentence, as it were, in a local network. One direction that we could work our way along that network would be to say that a speaker must also understand sentences like; “That cube is red”, “That cone is red”, “That table is red”, etc. What this amounts to saying is that a speaker must know that the predicate “is red” can apply to a certain distinctive range of other objects, aside from a ball. If someone was incapable, conceptually, of recognising this fact of generality then we would not ascribe to him a grasp of the concept that the predicate expresses.

For example, a child beginning to acquire language might respond to things it sees in its environment by making one-word utterances to certain observable situations; “Ball” “Red” “Square”, “Doggy”, “Mummy”, etc. From the point of view of the *parent*, these might be elliptical for one word sentences which they can use to pick up information about the environment around their child; the significance of such words is already there for the adult only. If, for example, the child says “Doggy” when it is in the next room, then this might be elliptical for the sentence “The dog is here”, and so the parent knows that there is a dog in the next room with the child (Dummett, 1983, p. 136). The child, at this stage, however, is simply reacting appropriately (again, only from the parent’s point of view) to what it sees by making vocal noises to particular items; concept possession is not in the picture as yet for the child and it is simply responding to stimuli in its environment. Progression towards concept possession is made when the child begins to recognise that being red is not something that is unique to a particular toy that it has been taught to respond to with the sound “red” but has a generality that other objects can be; to the way his toy cube is, to the way his table is, to the way his mother’s dress is, etc. This is exactly one way we judge whether someone possesses a particular concept in actual practice. If the child could not see the common connection

¹⁷ See (Dummett, 1991a, p. 221-225), which I base the majority of this discussion on.

between its ball and its toy cube then he simply does not possess the concept *red*, for it would be doubtful whether he recognises the fact that the way that the ball is, is a way that various other objects can be. It is constitutive to the possession of that concept that a speaker has the capacity to recognise that various things can be red. Once the child does see the common element, however, then the child's behaviour would need to manifest this fact, perhaps by going around saying "The ball is red", "The cube is red", "Mum's dress is red", etc. However, for similar reasons, what the child must also understand is sentences like "That ball is round", "That ball is heavy", "That ball is large", "That ball is soft", etc. since the sentence "That ball is red" does not just demand a possession of the concept *red*, it also demands that the child can understand other things that can be said about the ball in order for him to be credited with thinking about the ball and *its* redness, rather than focusing on any other object and its redness. Possession of one concept therefore demands possession of a range of other concepts that are all acquired together as the child begins to work his way into a particular sector of language. In this case, plausibly a number of other concepts concerning shape, as well as ones concerning different ways particular objects can be, such as size, height, colour, texture, etc.

What the above considerations entail is that understanding a word and possession of a concept consists in understanding a certain range of other sentences that contain that word. In that sense, sentences are prior in order of explanation when it comes to explaining what speakers' competency of a language consists. However, that same word may also occur in sentences where a speaker is required to have a prerequisite understanding of that word in order to understand that sentence. This brings in the most important aspect that Dummett draws from his molecularism, that there will be an asymmetric dependency relation between speakers' understanding of sentences which results in language being organised into a hierarchy of fragments. This is best explained in terms of speakers' understanding of the logical constants. What molecularism entails is that understanding a logical constant, "and" say, *consists in* the ability to understand any sentence of which "and" is the main operator of. However, in order to understand a more complex sentence where "and" occurs, but is not the main operator, a speaker must have a prior understanding of "and". An understanding of that constant precedes a speakers' understanding of the more complex sentence, and it will in fact *yield* an understanding of the more complex sentence

along with an understanding of the other constituent expressions in the sentence.

Understanding these more complex sentences does not, therefore, go towards constituting an understanding of that constant in the first place. Instead, an understanding of these complex sentences depends upon a prior understanding of “and”. The same sorts of considerations are intended to apply to all the languages’ words and expressions. Dummett offers the example of the word “fragile” in this respect:

Thus, to understand the word “fragile”, for example, it is necessary to understand its use for some simple predications like “That plate is fragile”; an understanding of such a sentence as “I’m afraid that I forgot that it was fragile” *builds on* and *requires* an antecedent understanding of the word “fragile” but is not a condition of understanding it (Dummett, 1991a, p. 224-225).

This brings in an asymmetric dependency relation between sentences because in order to understand sentences like “I’m afraid that I forgot that it was fragile”, a speaker must have an understanding of sentences of a similar complexity that surround that sentence in a local network or language fragment. However, a speaker must *also* have a prior understanding of sentences of a lower complexity like “That plate is fragile”. In order to understand this latter sentence, a speaker must understand a certain range of sentences of similar complexity that occur within the same fragment to which that sentence belongs, like “That bowl is fragile”, “That glass is fragile”, “That plate is hot”, “That plate is clean”, etc. Language is being organised into a hierarchy of language fragments. Understanding the sentence “I’m afraid that I forgot that it was fragile” depends upon having an understanding of sentences of a lower complexity that belong to a fragment of language below that to which the more complex one belongs. It is having a competency of these less complex fragments of language which will yield an understanding of sentences that belong to more complex fragments. Understanding a word consists in understanding sentences that surround it in a network, and does not require understanding sentences of higher complexity that belong to a different fragment, but sentences of a higher complexity require a prerequisite understanding of the sentences that belong to the lower levels.

4.2. Behaviourism and the Builders

Having now outlined Dummett’s commitment to molecularism, which will be useful going forward, I turn to what his preferred notion of use would be on his account. What this

section suggests is that Wittgenstein's language-game of the builders are useful in thinking about the conceptual level at which a Dummettian notion of use would lie.

The difficulty that Dummett faces is that use cannot be described in terms of the very thoughts that our explanations are concerned explaining possession of, given full-bloodedness. The hierarchy of a molecular account and his commitment to reductionism also dictates that at the ground level, use has to be described in non-semantic and non-intentional terms as well.¹⁸ It cannot be described in naturalistic terms either, on pain of lapsing into behaviourism, a position that Dummett has consistently maintained he has no interest with. Instead Dummett's notion of use is going to have to be described in terms that fall somewhere in-between the merely behaviouristic and the semantic and intentional. This sub-surface reading of use will have to be systematically related to the notion of use given at the surface which is construed in terms of what thoughts sentences of a language can be used to express. It will be in the theory of force that such sub-surface readings of use given in Part 1 of the meaning-theory are related to the content of speech-acts.

Consider the only explicit example that Dummett provides of what he thinks a full-blooded explanation of concept possession will look like:

...any account of what it is to associate a concept with a word would have to provide an explanation of one thing which might constitute a grasp of the concept. What is it to grasp the concept *square*, say? At the very least, it is to be able to discriminate between things that are square and those that are not, such an ability can be ascribed only to one who will, on occasion, treat square things differently from things that are not square; one way, among many other possible ways, of doing this is to apply the word "square" to square things and not to others. And it can only be by reference to some such use of the word "square", or at least some knowledge *about* the word "square" which would warrant such a use of it, that we explain what it is to associate the concept *square* with that word. An ability to use the word in such a way, or a suitable piece of knowledge about the word, would, by itself, *suffice* as a manifestation of a grasp of the concept (Dummett, 1978a, p. 98).

This suggests what a Dummettian notion of use would be. What we are told is that people who grasp the concept *square* are differentially sensitive to square things. This is obviously true, but triangular holes are differentially sensitive to square shapes. It might be suggested that speakers are differentially sensitive in the sense that they react appropriately to square

¹⁸ This will be expanded upon in 5.1

things, maybe by making the noise “square” in the presence of square things or by bringing a particular square thing upon hearing that noise, much like Wittgenstein’s builders (Wittgenstein, 2001, §2) are trained to bring a slab upon hearing the appropriate call. In the case of the builders, we do have normativity as we have correct and incorrect responses to “slab”, and so there is more here than we find with mere conditioned behaviour. Take the causally conditioned behaviour of animals found in the Skinner box experiments, where an animal is conditioned into pressing a lever when it sees a red light and is rewarded with food. The animal is trained to press the lever when it sees a red light, and, if it does so, it displays the fact that it is differentially sensitive to red things, with its behaviour then being rewarded with food. These norms that the animal’s behaviour complies/conforms to (that it should press the lever when it sees a red light) are imposed upon it by the experimenters, and it is from their perspective and awareness that the behaviour of the animal is deemed as being correct or incorrect. This is why we say that the animal’s behaviour has been causally conditioned. Without the experimenters, there would be no way the animal could go wrong in its responses. The animal lacks all awareness or understanding in what it is doing and the appropriateness of its behaviour; it has simply undergone conditioning to do certain things and is disposed to act in a particular way.

With Wittgenstein’s builders, the call “slab” expresses a norm. Builder B ought to bring a slab to Builder A upon hearing that call, and so Builder B’s behaviour can be correct or incorrect. If he brings a slab, he has responded correctly, and if he brings a beam, then he has responded inappropriately. The difference between the builders and the animals in the Skinner box experiments is that the builders are engaged in some sort of primitive practice, and the norms that are present are inherent/internal to it. The builders also have an understanding or awareness that their behaviour is appropriate when they bring a slab upon hearing that call. The behaviour of the builders can also be taught and learned by others. What this means is that when we attempt to capture what is going on with the builders, we cannot explain it solely in terms of Builder B being causally conditioned to respond as he does and set into motion when he hears the vocalisation of Builder A. Instead, we have to invoke some notion of normativity in saying that Builder B should act in such a way when he hears a particular call, and Builder B should be aware of the appropriateness of his behaviour. It is because the builders are responding with understanding and awareness

regarding the appropriateness of their behaviour in an established practice that we cannot just describe the scenario in causal terms as we do with the animals in the Skinner box experiments.

However, in this scenario, it is clear that although there is more here than we find with conditioned behaviour, there is not enough to find full-blown concept possession, content, truth, etc. as being present as yet. When we describe what is going on with the builders we also cannot describe it in terms of Builder B having a possession of the concept *slab*, or that Builder B responds as he does *because* he recognises that his response is appropriate. Here “because” is a reason invoking one, which involves recognising, in McDowell’s words, reasons *as* reasons. Recognising reasons *as* reasons involves having the capacity to stand back from a situation and assess whether something is a reason that warrants a particular action or not. It is this that is involved in the activity of reasoning and inferring (McDowell, 2006). With competent speakers of a language, they do not have to always exercise this capacity and reflect on whether something is a reason to say something else, or perform a particular action. What matters is that they have the capacity to do this, and this capacity comes with possession of content and concepts. This is why these cluster of ideas regarding content, reasoning and inferring are absent with the case of the builders, for they are related to ideas regarding the generality constraint.

When we mark out the capacity to respond to reasons as such that speakers of a language possess, this still allows room for non-concept possessing, non-rational animals to respond to reasons, just not to respond to them *as* reasons. When we look at non-concept possessing animals, like a chicken, which avoids a particular food from having had a bad reaction to eating it in the past, it is natural and perfectly intelligible to make sense of its avoidance behaviour by saying that a particular caterpillar being poisonous is why the chicken refrains from eating it; in an obvious sense, the chicken is responding to a reason. Viewing non-concept possessing animals in a way which does not credit them with reason is also perfectly compatible with seeing them as being resourceful and clever, etc., that is, as having mental lives¹⁹ and that they can “intelligently and even reflectively devise a means to

¹⁹ Which is presumably why Dummett ascribes to animals and pre-linguistic infants ‘proto-thoughts’.

an end: Kohler's chimpanzee is a clear...example" (Dummett, 1985a, p. 149)²⁰. This is important if we are to avoid seeing the rest of the animal kingdom as mere automata, or as being differentially sensitive to their environment in the same sense that a nail is differentially sensitive to its environment by rusting. That animals cannot reason and that they are bound to behaving as they do because of their natural biological impulses does not mean that their differential sensitiveness to their environment is no different to an inanimate object. Nor does emphasising the fact that an animal's behaviour flows from its natural tendencies mean that its behaviour is not voluntary.

Builder B could very well be said to be responding to a reason, his acting in a particular way is made sense of in that he has heard a particular call, and he has an awareness of the appropriateness of his behaviour. This means that the relation between Builder A and B is a very basic normative one and not just a causal one. However the builders do not have possession of content, they are not responding to reasons as such and they do not possess the capacity to reason. With competent speakers who possess the concept *poisonous*, they know that they *should* not eat a particular food *because* it is poisonous, and they know that they should not eat something that is poisonous because they know that it will make them sick or make them ill or that they will die. Possession of a concept allows for a process of reflective reasoning and inferring that is simply not possessed by those that lack possession of content. As I said, it is natural to say that the chicken is responding to a reason, but it does not reason and reflectively acknowledge that it should avoid a certain food because it is poisonous, and that it will become ill should it decide to eat the food anyway. How we are to construe the awareness or understanding that the builders possess of the appropriateness of their behaviour is, however, difficult. It would have to be something that we could only label as being very basic and which does not require possession of content. Instead Builder B just acts as he does and is intelligently aware that what he is doing *now*... is appropriate, or "fits", to what he has just heard. This would fall between the level of being causally disposed to bring a slab, on the one hand, and

²⁰ Kohler's chimpanzee experiments essentially consisted of bananas being placed out of the reach of chimpanzee's, with the chimps devising ways to retrieve them, such as building ladders from crates.

as having the capacity to stand back from the situation and explicitly recognise and reason that it is because Builder A called “slab” that he should bring a slab, on the other.

It is on the basis of such reflective reasoning and inferring that we make sense of the behaviour of speakers of a language in a way that is very different to the case of animals or the builders. If we see someone eat a particular poisonous food, we make sense of what they did by asking whether they knew it was poisonous. If they did, why did they eat it? Do they think that eating a small amount will make them immune from the poison if they consume small amounts? (Evans, 1981, p. 337). Do they like the taste of it, despite it being bad for them? When raising such questions, we are trying to make sense of their behaviour by ascribing intentions, desires, actions, etc. onto them, but we are doing this in a way in which we are crediting the agent with a knowledge of the inferential relations that exist between his thoughts, beliefs, desires, etc. Perhaps the agent thinks that he should eat the food because, despite him knowing that it is poisonous, he combines this knowledge with the belief that it will ultimately lead to immunisation.

4.3. Justificationist and Pragmatist Meaning-Theories

There is still a huge difference, then, between what the builders do and concept possession, even if they are engaged in a normative practice. The builders do not possess reason and the central notions that concern the philosophy of language are not present in this practice. Continuing with Dummett’s square example, what he suggests is that concept possession comes into the picture because speakers know how to apply the word “square” to square things and not to others, and that it can only be by reference to some such knowledge about the word “square” which would warrant such an application of it in suitable circumstances that we can explain what it is to possess the concept *square*. A speaker’s differential sensitivity to square things is, then, described in terms of knowing-how to do something, namely having the ability to appropriately apply the word “square”. The notion of “apply” must be understood here as falling between the two levels of description that Dummett wants to avoid. A move towards understanding what this notion of use must amount to is made by considering how we mark possession of content. When a speaker grasps the concept *square*, he has to know that “is square” can apply to a certain distinctive range of objects, which means he must understand a certain range of sentences that contain that predicate. Understanding these sentences then requires that the speaker understands further

sentences. Possession of one concept requires possession of many concepts. In gaining a competency of a language fragment, and so possession of a collection of concepts that belong to that fragment, Dummett argues that speakers gain an appreciation of the ways a sentence can be established and the consequences of its acceptance. These inferential relations are constitutive to the meaning of a word or sentence. His general strategy is to take these ideas as being central in his account, with possession of particular concepts being explained derivatively, since sentences gain priority in order of explanation. The sense in which speakers know how to correctly apply the word "square" to square things is the sense in which speakers know when an application of that word is entitled, and they also know the commitments the application of that word are to him:

What constitutes "use"? ... In Wittgenstein's writings, there are three fundamental features of use. First is what is accepted as justifying an utterance. If the utterance is of an assertoric character, this becomes what vindicates it or establishes it as correct. This comes under the head of the *grounds* for asserting a statement: these include what is acknowledged as entitling a speaker to make the assertion, what requires him to withdraw it, and in what circumstances, if any, it is conclusively shown to be correct. The second feature consists of what a speaker commits himself to by saying something, and what is counted as a proper response to another's utterance. When the utterance is assertoric, this comes under the head of the *consequences* of making the assertion: what actual or potential difference it makes to what is done or said by the speaker or his hearers. It includes what constitutes acting on an assertion when it is accepted, as well as inferences drawn from the statement so asserted (Dummett, 2002, p. 10).²¹

Both notions of use are important for Dummett. Consider the case of the child beginning to work his way into language and who starts off by making one word utterances like "Square", "Round", "Red", "Blue", "Ball", "Cone", "Doggy", etc. to a distinctive range of objects. In this sense we may say that he is recognising when an application of that word is entitled; he understands that to say "Doggy" is appropriate whenever there is a dog present to him. Recognising when an application of a word is entitled in appropriate circumstances is not the only thing that possession of a concept confers though; a speaker who was only able to do this would only be able to give information to others but would not

²¹ The third feature of use that Dummett credits to Wittgenstein is the point of having a given form of words in the language. We can put this third feature to one side, as Dummett predominantly focuses his attention on the first two features, with him suggesting that the point of a particular form of words is not a genuine independent feature of use.

be able to receive any information from others (Dummett, 2002b, p. 15). Instead, when a child begins to recognise when the application of particular words he has learnt are entitled, and so convey information to others about his surroundings, he also simultaneously begins to accept other speakers' utterances to him based on testimony and act in accordance to them. For instance, imagine the child is afraid of the dog, and his mother tries to warn him that the dog is in the next room by saying "Doggy". In order for the child to be credited with understanding "Doggy" as being elliptical for "There is a dog here", he would need to know the consequences of an utterance of "Doggy", and act suitably in accordance. If he entered the room in spite of his mother's utterance, and then became alarmed on seeing the dog, then he does not take "Doggy" as meaning "There is a dog here", even if he does have the habit of saying "Doggy" whenever the dog is present to him. Concept possession would still not be in the picture as yet for the child, and we would be reluctant to say that he is responding with understanding by uttering "Doggy" at the sight of the dog. Instead he is simply conditioned to make a vocalisation in the presence of the dog (Dummett, 1983, p. 136).

This is why both aspects of use are important for Dummett, and they are what mark the distinction between conditioned response and concept possession. Competent speakers who possess the concept *red* know that if they accept that the ball is red, then one of the consequences of this acceptance is that they are also committed to accepting that the ball is coloured, and speakers know that they are entitled to say that Bill is dead based upon the fact that Bill was murdered. Understanding such conceptual ties between the concepts expressed by the words "red" and "coloured" is prerequisite in order to be credited with possession of either. If someone was willing to accept that something is red but then declined to accept it was also coloured, then he cannot have a correct understanding of one of these concepts, if not both. Molecularism takes this a step further by demanding that possession of some concepts not only come together as a package as a speaker works their way into a particular language fragment, but that possession of some concepts are prerequisite for possession of more complex concepts. It is arguable, for example, that speakers must understand when sentences like "x is dead" are entitled before one understands when an application of "x is murdered" is.

A meaning-theory that takes as central a notion of use that is connected to entitlement is often called a “justificationalist” theory in Dummett’s work, and this is his favoured account. A speaker is warranted in making an assertion if he has reasons or grounds that entitle the assertion to be made, and Dummett characterises these reasons as being what will establish the assertion as true, or as correct as it is in the above cited passage. Dummett tells us that we typically establish assertions as true by following certain chains of reasoning from which an assertion of a sentence can be inferred from, and so the circumstances that warrant an assertion will in general involve inferential reasoning. The archetypal case of this will be the case of mathematics whereby an assertion is established as true entirely by pure inferential, deductive reasoning. However, the circumstances that entitle an assertion cannot be confined to inference, since such reasoning will often rest on premises arrived at by observation. For most assertions, then, their establishment is given by a mixture of observation and reasoning. At the other end of the spectrum, assertions made by means of purely observational sentences will be given by means of practical capacities described in terms of making certain perceptual observations, mental operations (like counting) or physical observations (like measuring). It is through such sentences that Dummett thinks the account does not remain trapped within language, with the decision procedures that govern observational predicates often being called “language-entry rules”. Given molecularism and the hierarchical structure that this position imposes on language, the general strategy will be to start with sentences of minimal complexity, which Dummett tells us will be observational sentences (Dummett, 1983, p. 139). We will then provide our explanations for sentences of equal complexity, before proceeding to our explanations of those sentences that are of the next degree of complexity. When the theory comes to explain the meanings of items within a particular fragment of language, it will do so by presupposing an understanding of the meanings of sentences that belong to a fragment that is of a lower complexity to the one we are giving an account of. The account will then use the inferential relations *from* sentences of lower complexity, whose meanings are presupposed, *to* sentences of the fragment we are considering, whose meanings we are ignorant about, to give an account of their meaning.

In being concerned about characterising meaning and speakers’ competency, Dummett is interested in the most direct or typical means by which an assertion is established. For

example, the know-how that is possessed by a speaker who understands an assertion of the observation sentence "There are nineteen eggs in the basket" will consist in the ability to count how many eggs there are. There will always be a number of indirect ways of establishing the assertion of such a sentence. It might be established by remembering how much money you started out with, looking at how much you have got left, subtracting the difference and calculating the number of eggs based upon the price per egg. Though this is a perfectly good procedure, it is clearly not essential to have this sort of knowledge that constitutes understanding the sentence "There are nineteen eggs in the basket" (Dummett, 1983, p. 142). Indirect establishments still have a role for speakers though. It reflects a distinction between meaning-fixing inferences and non-meaning-fixing inferences, with the latter being at the service of those who are competent speakers of the language.

A meaning-theory that takes the second notion of use that Dummett mentions, which concerns the consequences of making an assertion, is called a "pragmatist" theory. Again, this will mainly be concerned with inference and what can be directly inferentially drawn from sentences used to make assertions. It will therefore involve what other sentences a speaker is committing himself to accepting when he makes a particular assertion. We are told that the same sort of duality exists that we encountered above between observation sentences and purely inferential ones, in that the account cannot be confined only to inference since the consequences of making an assertion will often issue in a particular action or sequences of actions being taken. A sentence the acceptance of which has as an immediate consequence an action or sequence of actions by the speaker is called an "action sentence" by Dummett (Dummett, 1983, p. 140). Conversely to a justificationist account, molecularism and the hierarchy means that a pragmatist account can only appeal to inferences from sentences of a higher complexity to those of a lower complexity in giving its answers as to the meanings and competency of items in a language. However, Dummett sees these two different meaning-theories as being two alternative ways of explaining the meanings of sentences of a language and what competency of the language consists in. They are alternative since either notion is seen as being sufficient to determine the meaning of a sentence, but both are needed to give a full account. This does not mean, however, that the sort of theory he has in mind will consist in two central notions. Instead, the two features of use cannot be assigned independently; given the grounds that entitle an assertion, the

consequences of its acceptance should follow, and vice versa. As such, justificationist and pragmatist accounts are not true rivals (Dummett, 1985a, p. 162). Instead they are alternatives in that they take different notions of use as primary but hope to draw the other from that which is taken as central.²² The two accounts are also seen as sharing a common feature in that the core and shell of each meaning-theory will collapse (Dummett, 1976, p. 85), since the core of each meaning-theory is seen as specifying something that speakers can directly display in their use of the language, as opposed to how Dummett reads the truth-conditional conception. Such accounts will therefore simultaneously provide the semantics for the language as well as display what it is for items of the language to mean what they do and what it is for speakers to be competent with those items. It will do this in acceptably non-trivial terms for Dummett by using the hierarchical structure of language, which comes with his commitment to molecularism, to its advantage in giving its answers. Nevertheless, even if the core and shell do eventually collapse on Dummett's preferred position, a substantial theory of force is still required, as he would still need to show how whatever Part 1 of the meaning-theory specifies is systematically related to the level of use given at the surface (McDowell, 1981, p. 323).

4.4. Conclusion

The case of Wittgenstein's builders was used to suggest the possibility of a level of vocabulary that falls between the two levels that Dummett wants to avoid; the merely causal and behaviouristic, on the one hand, and the fully semantic and intentional, on the other. The builders are engaged in a basic normative, vocalised practice which is embedded in a wider non-linguistic activity of building. The central notions that concern the philosophy of language that are bound up with rationality are not, however, present in this language-game. Dummett would agree with that. Given his advocacy of a justificationist meaning-theory, and his strong emphasis on inferential articulation within language, I have suggested that the difference between full-blown language and the builder's lies, for Dummett, in the fact that the builders do not have an inferential practice that allows them to justify or draw out consequences of their behaviour and actions. Moving away from

²² This involves complicated ideas concerned with harmony between these two notions of use which leads to Dummett's revisionist stance, and the notion of a conservative extension. I want to put such ideas to one side.

Dummett exegesis by comparing his desired level of description with that of the builders opens up a position from which to criticise his account. This will be the purpose of the forthcoming chapter.

Chapter 5

Wittgenstein's Builders, Rationality and the Central Concepts

5.0. Introduction

Although Dummett's ambition to shed the maximum amount of intelligibility on the central concepts, whilst also steering clear of psychologism and behaviourism, is admirable, this project cannot be successfully achieved by going down the route of reductionism.

Dummett's account does indeed construe language use as being something more than we find in the conditioned behaviour of animals in the Skinner box experiments. However by describing language in non-semantic, non-intentional terms, we will not have the resources to adequately capture the rational significance of language-use and the notions that Dummett is after an analysis of. What I suggest in 5.1 is that, at ground level, the hierarchy of molecularism and a commitment to reductionism dictates that Dummett will have to construe use in terms of the non-semantic entitlements of speakers. In doing so, he does not distance himself far enough from a position that sees language as being a practice akin to Wittgenstein's builder language-game. In this language-game, we do have a normative practice, in that Builder B should act by bringing a slab when he hears the appropriate vocalisation from Builder A, and Builder B should have some sort of awareness regarding the appropriateness of his behaviour. However, the builders are not engaged in a practice where content, truth, assertion (commanding) or rationality are present. Dummett makes an analogy with board games to establish his case for reductionism which I outline in 5.2, but far from helping him, the analogy looks to highlight the deficiencies in his account. For again, chess is not the sort of thing where truth, content, assertion, etc. are present, and the

moves do not have a significance that points to outside the game. The problem is that by describing language in non-semantic, non-intentional terms, Dummett is making language out as being, conceptually, an activity on a par to the many other types of activities that we are engaged in, rather than being something that is profoundly and fundamentally different.

I envisage a Dummettian reply to my criticisms in section 5.3 in which Dummett might appeal to the fact that since the notions of knowledge and understanding are ineliminable in his account, it delivers something that allows us to bring to bear concepts concerned with rationality, such as those of motives, intentions, purposes, etc. This connects with Dummett's distinction between what is said and the point of saying it which I outlined in 3.3. The point of an utterance concerns why a speaker said what they said on a particular occasion and will rely on their intentions and purposes at the time. It is only against a background of assuming that a speaker understands and knows what he is saying that it makes sense to ask after the point of saying what he did, Dummett tells us. Since the theory aims to specify what is said on a particular occasion, and credits speakers with having this knowledge, the theory makes room for asking after the point of an utterance and so construes language as being a rational activity. This reply is argued as being inadequate, however, since the builders too must also be credited with some form of basic understanding or awareness in the appropriateness of their behaviour, just as speakers must be at the ground level, yet this does not mean they possess rationality. Making such notions as understanding and knowledge ineliminable will not be the remedy to magic rationality and the central concepts into the picture.

In this chapter, I aim to think about how the builders relate to the notion of use that would fit Dummett's account. This signals a departure from Dummett exegesis which was the primary concern of the last two chapters. It is because Dummett's notion of use would have to lie on the same conceptual level as the vocabulary used to describe the activity of the builders that this comparison is valuable in understanding Dummett's enterprise more clearly. It also provides me with a position from which to criticise his account and commitment to reductionism by highlighting how close Dummett's account is to the practice of the builders where the central concepts and rationality are not present. The concluding thought is that Dummett will not be able to reconstruct force notions, which are semantic and intentional, within Part 2 of his meaning-theory from sub-surface readings of use or

make language out as being a rationality activity “par excellence” as he intends. This completes the second part of my argument that neither McDowell nor Dummett are successful in establishing their strong contentions in the form that a meaning-theory should take.

5.1. Dummett and Quine on Inference

The previous chapter established that, for Dummett, what marks the distinction between concept possession and non-concept possession is that concept possession consists in knowing the inferential relations between concepts that are constitutive of them being the concepts they are. Competent speakers who possess the concept *red* know that if they accept that a ball is red, then they are committed to accepting that the ball is coloured. The pigeon that presses a lever whenever it sees a red light is differentially sensitive to red things, but its behaviour has been causally conditioned and this process of inferential reasoning is totally absent. This ability to know the inferential relations between concepts connects in the relevant sense to the possessor’s rationality; to their ability to take part in the activity of reasoning. It is only subjects that can reason when in possession of content that can be said to be rational. In marking out the inferential relations that exist in a language by using his preferred notion of use regarding the grounds that justify an utterance, Dummett looks to have the resources to incorporate the inherent rationality of language in his meaning-theory. A frequent acquisition, however, is that in wanting his account to be reductive, Dummett will, in the end, be unable to hold on to this feature. That he is opposed to such a consequence is clear:

I have many times remarked that a [meaning-theory] is not to be assessed as a scientific systematisation of regularities in complex phenomena; it is to be judged by whether it gives an intelligible description of a practice engaged in by rational agents. We are not looking for a theory with predicative power, but for a description that makes sense of the activity as one carried on by rational beings (Dummett, 1987a, p. 260).

Dummett is here responding to an accusation he takes McDowell to have levelled against him regarding an acceptance of behaviourism. As he frequently comments, the use of language is the primary manifestation of our rationality, and, indeed, it is *the* rational activity *par excellence* (Dummett, 1979, p. 104). Even if we knew how to construct a theory that had the power of predicting exactly what speakers would be entitled to say and how

they would act and respond at any given moment, the account would be inherently behaviouristic and would not be a meaning-theory if it failed to construe language-use as being something engaged in by rational agents. Instead the account has to deliver something that allows for a process of making best sense of speakers' behaviour, of estimating their intentions, motives, aims, desires, etc. It is in this context that Dummett puts forward his objections to W. V. Quine's notion of use characterised in terms of speakers' dispositions to assent to and dissent from sentences under certain sensory stimulations. For Quine, like Dummett, also wishes to stress the inferential connections that exist between the languages' sentences. The meanings of observation sentences are given directly in terms of dispositions to assent to and dissent from them under certain sensory stimulations. The rest of the languages' sentences will be connected to these observation sentences through inferential ties, and the meanings of these sentences will be given in terms of conditional dispositions to assent to and dissent from them, given prior assent to and dissent from other sentences. On such an account, the inferential connections that are being spelled out are only captured in terms of causal and dispositional connections. The fact that Dummett highlights and emphasises the inferential structure of language does not, therefore, in itself give him the resources to distance himself from behaviourism, for it depends on how he is construing these inferential connections.

However, what Dummett has to say about Quine's account shows that he has clear reservations as to whether Quine's limited construal of inference would be adequate for a meaning-theory:

From the standpoint of Quine and Davidson, if I have understood them aright, to appeal to such a complicated thing as the justifications which speakers give of their assertions is out of the question, since, to become aware of that, or even to recognize what constituted a demand for justification and what a response to it, one would have already to understand a large part of the language... Now what is the point of posing the problem: How we should arrive at an interpretation of a language hitherto quite unknown to us? It is, surely, to exclude from the description of the interpretation or of the process of arriving at it any appeals to concepts which covertly presuppose an understanding of the language. But the consequence of so posing the problem is that we fasten on some feature of the speakers' linguistic behaviour which can be described at the outset, before any understanding of the language has been gained, and try to use it as the basis for the entire interpretation. Language is, however, an enormously complicated thing,

and it is highly unlikely that a satisfactory interpretation of it is accessible if we so restrict ourselves (Dummett, 1979, p. 115).

Here, Dummett does suggest that there is something right with how he reads the explanatory strategy of Davidson and Quine. What is right with posing the problem as to how we could come to understand a language previously unknown to us is that our answers regarding particular items of the language should be non-trivial in nature. Meeting that aim by construing use and inference in such behaviouristic terms, as Quine intends, is not the right way to go, however. We do not need to deprive ourselves of such intentional and semantic notions as those of justification in giving a description of the entire language.²³ What Dummett is trying to do in this passage is carve a path between modesty on the one hand and behaviourism on the other. Given full-bloodedness, we should not presuppose the meanings of sentences we are trying to give our explanations for, but we should not read inferential connections in terms of conditional dispositions to assent to and dissent from them, given prior assent to and dissent from other sentences. Instead, Dummett's commitment to molecularism and the hierarchy of language fragments, which was outlined in the previous chapter, allows us to be perfectly well entitled to presuppose the meanings of those sentences that are of a lower complexity that belong to a language fragment below that to the one we are aiming to provide our answers for, and perhaps those of equal complexity (Dummett, 1983, p. 139). We can then have a notion of use that does not concern the particular thought that our explanation is concerned explaining possession of, but instead concerns those of lesser complexity. Behaviourism is avoided since Dummett is entitled to a notion of use and inference that is semantic in nature and is not characterised in terms of speakers' dispositions to make particular noises under particular conditions. As he says in the above cited passage, he does not want to deprive himself of the notion of justification completely, and this allows him to then spell out the inferential connections that exist in the language under study, not in terms of causal and dispositional connections, but in terms of content-full reasons and justifications.

²³ See (Dummett, 2007, p. 379) for a similar comment; "what we learn to do must be capable of describing without presupposing anything. It is indeed much harder to arrive at a satisfactory and convincing such description than it was to acquire the practice in the beginning. As we attempt to do so, we are more or less bound at initial stages to employ concepts we have by being language-users, trusting that we shall eventually be able to dispense with such props by explaining those concepts without presuppositions".

If we were only considering, in isolation, Dummett's line of argument for those sentences that we are able to presuppose the meanings of ones that are of a lower complexity in giving our answers to what their meanings and competency consist in, then he does have the resources to respond to McDowell's frequent accusations of not capturing the rationality of language. The problem is that Dummett's demand for reductionism, and the hierarchical nature of molecularism, entails that, at bottom, the facts and behaviour that concern meaning and competency cannot be characterised in terms of semantic or intentional notions. It is then very difficult to see how the account is able to capture the rational linkages in concepts at this ground level. The problem now is that, if the rational linkages are not captured at this ground level, then because the rest of Dummett's explanations are ultimately given from this ground floor by presupposing the meanings of those sentences that belong there, the problem will infect upwards and contaminate the rest of the account as well. For if Dummett is not able to capture content and rationality at the base upon which the rest of his account is built, then how will he be able to bring such notions into view in the penultimate molecular fragment, where the meanings and competency of those sentences will be understood in terms of the inferences from sentences that belong to the fundamental fragment? Either the account has to have such notions from top to bottom, or it does not have them at all, it would seem.

Following on from the above cited passage regarding how he reads the explanatory strategy of Davidson and Quine, Dummett explicitly acknowledges that eventually he will have to do without semantic and intentional concepts altogether:

We already have, in our language, expressions for various concepts which relate to our use of language, among them that of the justification of an assertion. What we want to arrive at is a model of that in which our understanding of our language consists, a model which will be adequate to explain the entire practice of speaking the language. Certainly that model must itself be described in terms which do not presuppose a tacit understanding of terms, such as "assertion", "justification", "true", etc., which relate to the practice of which the model aims to provide an account, or it will, to that extent, fail to be explanatory. But that does not mean that, in groping our way towards such a model, we must eschew appeal to any of those concepts which are not to be used in giving the model itself (Dummett, 1979, p. 115).

At the most fundamental fragments of language, there is nowhere left to go and so, although we can use semantic and intentional notions to start off with, we have to dispense with such

notions as props and explain meaning and competency of the most fundamental levels without presupposing such notions. A plausible suggestion is that since the vocabulary used to describe such an inferential practice has to be normative, but not semantic, Dummett would have to construe the practice in terms of a structure of entitlements at this level in his justificationist account, while a pragmatist account would have to use the comparable notion of commitment (cf. Brandom, 2000). These broad notions of entitlement and commitment obviously do not presuppose any semantic or intentional concepts which is why they might appeal to Dummett.

5.2. The Chess Analogy

In this respect, it is fruitful to consider an analogy with board games that Dummett invokes when making his claim that his desired reductive account must be possible to provide. Dummett claims that an account of chess can be given that would allow someone to move from no understanding of board games in general to an understanding of what it is to play chess. A comparable thing with an account of language can be achieved, he tells us. Such an account would be one that allowed us to understand the practice of language and the central concepts from a position that did not presuppose an understanding of such concepts. This would presumably be done by using a notion of use construed in terms of the non-semantic entitlements of speakers. Although Dummett intends to use this analogy to establish the fact that reductionism must be possible in the philosophy of language, it in fact underscores the deficiency of this position by making language too similar to the many other types of activities that we are engaged in which do not have the same rational significance, intentionality and concepts we are interested in.

Dummett begins making his comparison between an account of chess and an account of language by telling us that an account of board games could be approached by providing an account of one particular board game – chess. A formal description of chess could be given by laying out the initial starting positions of the pieces, and stating the rules that govern the pieces and which constitute what counts as a legitimate move within the game. Players make moves alternatively, and the game ends when there are no more legitimate moves to make. We could then classify the end-positions as follows: White checkmates Black, Black checkmates White, and stalemate (ignoring other kinds of draw and resignations) (Dummett, 1973a, p. 296). What Dummett tells us is that this account fails to

provide an account of what it is to play chess to anyone who is unfamiliar with board games. This can be seen from the fact that there could be a large number of variant games each sharing the same formal description. That is, games that have the same initial starting positions, the same rules and the same ending positions, but the aim of the game is different. For instance, the formal description would fit the game in which each player tries to force his opponent to checkmate him, or the game where White tries to produce a checkmate and Black tries to produce a stalemate. These games would be different games altogether to chess, but the difference between playing chess and these alternative games would not be given by the formal description. The difference between the games lies in what winning consists of or what the aim or point is. Since the formal description of chess does not tell us this, it merely specifies the possible end positions of the game, this description will not be enough to tell anyone unfamiliar with games what it is to play chess.

For someone who is already familiar with other games, what will need to be added to this formal description will be the supplementary statement that White wins if he checkmates Black, Black wins if he checkmates White and nobody wins if it is a stalemate. Anyone who is already familiar with other games will be able to rely on their understanding of playing games in general, and Dummett says that this will provide him with an understanding of the word "win", which will then allow him to make sense of the supplementary statement and distinguish chess from the alternative games that also fit the formal description. For anyone who is not already familiar with games, and does not know what it is to play games in general, this statement will be of no use to him since he will not be able to rely on his previous understanding of the word "win", and so the statement will simply provide a relabelling of the end-positions without telling him what it is to play chess as opposed to the alternative games. Dummett tells us that if we are wanting a full and satisfactory account of what it is to play chess as a human activity, then we need to provide an account that tells someone who is unfamiliar with other games what it is to play chess. The account must not, therefore, presuppose an understanding of the word "win". In this respect, Dummett is imposing upon our account of chess a comparable restriction we saw him impose on meaning-theories in section 3.3; the account cannot bring to bear a prior understanding of the significance of a word that is directly related to the activity we are attempting to comprehend ("win" with an account of chess, the truth-predicate, or other

semantic/intentional notions, for a meaning-theory). Because of this restriction, our account of chess will also have to encompass something comparable to a substantial theory of force that constructs the concepts we are interested in and reveals the significance of the end positions to the game of chess without relying on a prior understanding of other games in general and the word “win”. This would then allow someone to come to an understanding of what it is to play chess and what it is to win a game from this presuppositionless base.

Since Dummett is bound by this restriction, he is going to have to describe language-use at the ground level in terms of something like the entitlements of speakers when they make particular utterances, with this vocabulary being viewed as falling between the two levels he wants to avoid; causal dispositions on the one hand, and the semantic/intentional on the other. It must also allow him to derive the content of utterances, and be the basis from which the central concepts that concern the philosophy of language can be reconstructed, within the theory of force. However, if we are debarred from bringing to bear a prior understanding of a notion like assertion, then, similarly, given that assertion and inference are two sides of the same coin, we are debarred from bringing to bear a prior understanding of the notion of inference. What this means is that, just as we saw in the previous chapter where on Dummett’s understanding of the truth-conditional conception we cannot read the specifications of truth-conditions as already being specifications of the content of assertions, the entitlements he would be detailing on his own account cannot yet be read as being moves of inference (McDowell, 2005b, p. 295).

So far, then, the analogy that Dummett invokes regarding an account of chess and his reductive meaning-theory looks apt, but for the wrong reasons. For although the moves in chess might be characterised in terms of their significance to the subsequent prospects of which end position is achieved, the moves do not have a significance that points to outside the game. Setting aside whether it is possible for someone to come to an understanding of what it is to play chess from a theory of it, and from previously not understanding games in general, the moves in chess do not, after all, have content. Their significance is entirely internal to the game and to the effects that they have to the prospects of the players. There is no external point to the game which means that the moves in chess do not have the same type of significance that is inherent with linguistic meaning. If a comparable account is given for language as it is with chess in a meaning-theory, where the significance of speakers’

behaviour is captured in terms of his entitlements and the difference his moves potentially make to what subsequently happens (Dummett, 1989, p. 187), then it will make language out as being no more than a rule-governed game like chess, where the moves only have a significance internal to that activity and not to how things are outside it. As McDowell says, such an account might not miss anything about linguistic behaviour that is capturable using a notion like entitlement, but the account does not see moves in the game as assertions and see transitions between moves as inferences, but simply construes it all as complex rule-governed behaviour (McDowell, 2005b, p. 296).

This then questions whether the material that Dummett wants to use in Part 1 of a meaning-theory will eventually capture the intentionality and rational significance that the moves have which would ensure that the account is one concerned with a linguistic practice, rather than simply seeing speakers as being entitled to make particular vocalisations on particular occasions based upon previous moves being made. Dummett tells us that the account does not remain trapped within language at this level by having “language-entry rules” for purely observational sentences, with the entitlements of speakers being construed either in terms of speakers making certain observations, mental operations or physical observations. In this sense, these moves point to outside the activity by perhaps connecting it with other activities that speakers are engaged in and with observable features of the environment. However, these language-entry rules do not point in the same sense as moves characterised in terms of content do. Instead, the behaviour that speakers would be displaying if characterised in such terms would still look rigid, in that, in certain situations, speakers are entitled to vocalise something. The result is that there is nothing in these language-entry rules that ensures that these “pointers” to outside the activity reveal that practice as being one that is linguistic (McDowell, 2005b, p. 296).

From Dummett’s position, this might not, as yet, be a problem, precisely because the aim of Part 2 of a meaning-theory, the theory of force, is to connect the sub-surface material given in Part 1 to the level of use at the surface, a level of use that does indeed openly display its rational significance. It is here that the central concepts are at home and are reconstructed. However Dummett’s concession that he has no idea how a theory of force could pull off this trick is now very telling (Dummett, 1976, p. 41). Instead he claims that a theory of force *must* be able to do what he asks of it, and he makes this claim in tandem with

claiming that a theory of chess must be able to do something comparable. The general view that he wants to justify is that we can occupy a position from outside the conceptual space that the activity we are interested in concerns and describe what it is to be inside that activity so that we can make sense of it from this outside position by not using notions that arise within the conceptual space of that activity. With regards to chess, that means we can describe this activity without using a vocabulary that includes ready-made significance-revealing words such as those of “game” and “win”. Someone who has learnt chess can come to understand that activity from outside the conceptual space it occupies by not relying upon an understanding of such significance-revealing words. Dummett thinks that this suggests that the activity can be described from such an outside position. Just as someone can come to understand chess in this manner, so too he thinks that someone who has learnt language has come from a position from outside the conceptual space that language occupies, by not relying upon an understanding of significance-revealing words in acquiring the abilities they possess, which then suggests that language is amendable to this type of description:

[A meaning-theory]... cannot be required to provide more than the kind of sense which any account of a pattern of rational behaviour is required to have. Suppose that an anthropologist observes people of an alien culture engaging in some complicated co-operative activity. Its nature eludes him: is it a game? a religious ceremony? a decision-making process? Perhaps it is none of these: perhaps it does not fall squarely into any category with which we are familiar. He will strive to make sense of it, to render it intelligible to himself as a rational activity: to discover what exactly would count as engaging in that activity correctly; what subsequent consequences it has, if any; what role it plays in the life of the community. If it is classifiable as an activity of some familiar type, then he will so describe it; but, even if it is not, once he has learned to understand it, he will be able to describe it so as to make it intelligible to us, and hence he does not need to rely upon a term such as “game” or “ritual” already tailored to tell us the kind of point it has (Dummett, 1973a, p. 681-682).

Dummett’s commitment to reductionism looks to be one that is founded on a distinctive idea of how the central concepts that concern the philosophy of language arise within a linguistic practice that is situated in reality. For if the central concepts are being thought from a position that makes a reduction to ones that belong to a lower conceptual level look possible, then that can only be because Dummett thinks of the central concepts as being born within practice by being entirely determined by (or supervening on) facts about

human behaviour in such a way that we can step outside that linguistic practice and describe what it is to be inside it. Occupying a position from outside the practice would involve being able to describe the behaviour of participants so as to make sense of what it is for them to be involved in the activity by using notions and a vocabulary concerned with social norms but which are not semantic or intentional in nature, as these would be too closely akin to the notions that arise within the practice that Dummett is looking to provide an analysis of (cf. Dummett, 2007, p. 379). As McDowell states, Dummett's prohibition on meaning-theories taking as given semantic and intentional notions "expresses Dummett's conviction that such concepts must be explained by connecting them with a description of the practice of speaking a language given from outside the conceptual space they constitute" (McDowell, 2007, p. 358).

His analogy with chess and his comments in the above cited passage are meant to convince us that a maximally full-blooded account must be possible to provide, even if we do not, as yet, have a clear formulation as to how we can achieve it. What the analogy with chess in fact suggests is the opposite of what Dummett intends, however. An alternative picture is that we are unable to step outside the conceptual space that language occupies because there is nowhere to step outside to; reality already involves the central concepts that are bound up with rationality. This is why the chess analogy is of no help to Dummett in convincing us that his desired reductive account is possible to provide. Chess is a profoundly different activity to language. He might indeed be right that not every activity that an anthropologist can observe requires significance-revealing words to come to understand that activity (McDowell, 1981, p. 329), but that does not mean that in the case of language a comparable idea is plausibly applicable. Instead the reason why Dummett finds it so difficult to have a conception of what a viable theory of force would look like is surely because what he is asking it to do is simply not possible to provide; it is not possible to reduce semantic and intentional concepts to those of a lower conceptual level and capture the rationality of language.

5.3. A Dummettian Reply: Understanding, Knowledge and Awareness

Whenever Dummett is responding to accusations of not capturing the rationality of language, he is disposed to appeal to the fact that the notions of understanding and knowledge are ineliminable within his account. This suggests that a likely Dummettian

reply to my criticisms would be located in this area of his thought. Attributions of knowledge to speakers should be taken seriously, he tells us, rather than simply being idiomatic, if we are to make room for bringing to bear rational concepts that are concerned with the motives, intentions, purposes, etc. of speakers when making best sense of their linguistic behaviour. When we attempt to capture the significance of a move in chess, or explain the character of a game as a game, we do not do so in terms of an individual player's understanding of the rules. Instead, we simply state the rules of the game (Dummett, 1978a, p. 103). However, when we come to provide a meaning-theory for a language, Dummett is insistent that we cannot eliminate the notion of a speaker's knowledge and understanding of the language:

It is in the fact that a [meaning-theory] has to be evaluated as an intelligible description of an activity communally engaged in by intelligent agents that its non-behaviourist character must be located, not in rendering the content of utterances a mysterious non-natural property of them. Learning a language, including one's mother-tongue, is not simply undergoing training to say certain things in response to certain stimuli: it is being given a basis for rational acts involving the use of language. The trainee need not, in general, know what he is doing: he has been conditioned to do certain things in certain circumstances. A speaker must know what he is saying; if he does not, he is not truly saying anything. For someone to have a reason or motive for his utterance, an intention or purpose in making it, he must know what it, and other things he might have said, mean; his knowledge of the language provides the basis for his decision what, and what not, to say. It is for this reason that the notion of knowledge appears to play an inescapable part (Dummett, 1987a, p. 262).

The criticisms that McDowell has levelled over the years towards Dummett's account are the reason the latter came to reject the idea that competency of a language should be construed as being "merely" a practical capacity to speak it, comparable with having the ability to swim or ride a bike except in being immeasurably more complex (Heck, 2006, p. 22).²⁴ In his early work, this is how Dummett thought it was with competency of a language, and he expresses his regret in once seeing it like that by rehearsing a joke of P.G. Wodehouse (Dummett, 1978a, p. 94 and 1991a, p. 94). A character in one of his novels is asked "Can you

²⁴ This view is expressed in "What is a Theory of Meaning? (I)" where Dummett talks of a meaning-theory as being a theoretical representation of a practical ability, and its articulation as corresponding to the articulation of that complex ability (Dummett, 1975a, p. 21). Speaker's "knowing" the theory is then just loose talk for saying that the theory correctly articulates an ability they possess.

“speak Spanish?”, to which she replies, “I don’t know: I’ve never tried”. Part of the joke, and the absurdity of the reply, lies in the fact that you have to have learned Spanish in order to be able to speak it, and speaking Spanish is not the sort of thing that can be done without, at the same time, being aware that you can do it. Dummett tells us that there is a difference between such a reply when asked whether you can speak Spanish and a comparable one concerning swimming; “Can you swim?” – “I don’t know: I’ve never tried”. Dummett does not think it would be totally ludicrous to imagine someone who, when first put into water, found that they could swim to some extent and was not aware of that fact. Small infants are said to be able to do this and dogs can do this. The reply of “I don’t know: I’ve never tried” would then not have the same ring of absurdity as it does when given to the question about speaking Spanish. Someone who cannot swim knows what swimming is, and they can tell whether someone else is swimming, which is why he thinks it is not unreasonable to think of a situation where someone could then “have a go” at swimming. Someone who cannot speak Spanish does not know what it is to speak Spanish, and they cannot tell whether someone else is speaking Spanish as opposed to making Spanish sounding nonsense noises. This means that they cannot even attempt and try to speak Spanish. They would not know where to begin.²⁵

Competency of a language cannot, obviously, be seen as being explicit theoretical knowledge of a meaning-theory for that language on Dummett’s construal of the nature of a meaning-theory.²⁶ He came to see it as being something in-between the characterisations of

²⁵ There are problems with Dummett’s comparison. The juxtaposition between being unable to try and speak Spanish but being able to try and swim only makes sense if swimming is read as being the ability to stay afloat/keep ones head above water. It would not be ludicrous for someone to say “I don’t know: I have never tried” if this is what is meant by swimming, and what is meant by saying that infants placed in a pool can innately swim (Dummett, 1978a, p. 94). This is not something that is learned or taught; there is no proper technique for this kind of swimming/staying afloat. If someone was asked to keep their head above water, and so jumped into a pool and managed to do it in whatever way they could (perhaps by thrashing their arms around wildly, on their back, kicking one leg only) then it would be unreasonable for an observer to say “that’s not the proper way to keep your head above water!”. As long as the person in the pool does not drown, he has successfully stayed afloat. On the other hand, if swimming is read as being the ability to do the front crawl, say, then that is something that is learned and taught by others, and there is proper technique involved. Someone on the side of a pool giving a swimming lesson can say to a pupil that whatever he is doing is not the proper way to do the front crawl, that they are doing it wrongly, or, conversely, that they are doing it correctly.

²⁶ This is not so, it seems, for McDowell, who characterises competence in terms of an ability to know what thoughts can be expressed by sentences of the language. That knowledge can be made

knowledge-how and knowledge-that, labelling it as being implicit or tacit theoretical knowledge of a meaning-theory for that language (Dummett, 1976, p. 36). This did not last long, however, with Dummett becoming dissatisfied with the notion of implicit knowledge (Dummett, 1993, p. xi) and finally resting, unsatisfactorily, on a position which simply states that the knowledge possessed by speakers falls somewhere in-between the two notions, with the conventional dichotomy between practical and theoretical knowledge breaking down at precisely this point (Dummett, 1987a, p. 262). Nevertheless, Dummett thinks that it is because he denies that competency in a language is “merely” a practical ability, and instead involves serious attributions of knowledge, that the rational element of his position is located; “The difference lies in the fact that speaking a language is a conscious process” (Dummett, 1978a, p. 95).

This connects with Dummett’s distinction between *what* is said and the *point* of saying it which was outlined in 3.3. An account of what is said (which includes both the content and the speech act of an utterance) has to be given by a meaning-theory, while the point of an utterance (why a speaker said what they said on a particular occasion) will rely on their intentions, purposes, motives, etc. at the time. This does not concern anything special to language as such, allowing a meaning-theory to discharge any obligation to provide an account of this procedure. However, a meaning-theory must ultimately deliver something that allows room for making best sense of speakers’ behaviour regarding the point of their utterances. As Dummett notes, when speaking to others, we continually look and assess why someone else said what they said. What were they driving at? Were they joking or being serious? Why did they say something that was so obviously false? Or so obvious? Do they know what that word means? Are they being ironic or literal? Are they changing the subject or continuing with the current one? (Dummett, 1987a, p. 261). There are a whole host of questions like these that we ask ourselves in conversation with others, which is why a meaning-theory must deliver something that allows for this process to be intelligible.

It is only against a background of crediting a speaker with knowing what they are saying and doing that we can ask after the point of saying what they did, Dummett tells us.

explicit by stating what someone would be saying in an utterance of a sentence; “Snow is white” can be used to express the thought that snow is white (McDowell, 1997, p. 120).

This is another reason for Dummett taking seriously attributions of knowledge to competent speakers. He thinks that “mere” practical abilities do not provide sufficient grounds for purposes or intentions to be ascribed onto subjects (Dummett, 1993, p. x). Someone who has a practical ability may be able to do something without knowing how they do it. Dummett tells us that we could perfectly well imagine someone who has a practical ability to do something and when given a description of what they do they could say “Is *that* what I do?”. If, however, we are to ask after the point of saying what was said, then the hearer must estimate the point of the speaker expressing himself in the way he did, rather than choosing some other way to do it. That means we have to credit the speaker with knowing both ways of expressing himself, and choosing the way he did for some particular reason or purpose. That knowledge ascription has to be taken seriously, for Dummett, in order for the process of estimating a speaker’s point to be intelligible.

Dummett’s thought is that if practical abilities can be possessed by someone without them knowing how they do what they do, then, it seems, they can have no purpose in doing what they did rather than something else. By making competency of a language as being “merely” a practical ability to speak it, questions about why a speaker expressed himself in the way he did, rather than choosing some other way, would lapse. It is, then, because his account has an ineliminable notion of knowledge or understanding within it that Dummett thinks his desired meaning-theory delivers something that allows us to bring to bear concepts concerned with rationality. As he says in the above cited passage, a child beginning to work their way into language does not yet know what they are saying or doing; they are not aware of the significance of the words they are uttering and are just responding to stimuli. With a competent rational speaker, Dummett tells us that they know what they are saying and are aware of the appropriateness of their behaviour.

5.4. Wittgenstein’s Builders and the Dummettian Reply

This brings us back to the case of Wittgenstein’s builders which can be used to show that this envisaged response from Dummett to my earlier criticisms is inadequate. In the previous chapter we saw that although normativity is present with the builders, they cannot be seen as responding as they do *because* they recognise that their response is appropriate. The “because” here is a reason and content invoking because, and since content is not present in the builder language-game, this should not be how we characterise their

behaviour or understanding. At the most fundamental fragments of language, Dummett cannot, also, see speakers responding *because* they understand that their response is appropriate. This knowledge is a piece of sophisticated knowledge that would not tally with the hieratical nature of molecularism that has been established, or with Dummett's reductionist ambitions. Instead, just as I said the builders should be viewed as responding to reasons, just not responding to them as such, speakers of a language at this ground level must be viewed in a similar manner as responding and reacting as they do with a very basic understanding, knowledge or awareness that their behaviour is appropriate, although it is difficult to characterise it aptly.

Although he came to reject the idea of implicit or tacit knowledge, such ideas might have been the reason why Dummett was tempted to characterise the knowledge possessed by speakers by using those terms in the first place. Implicit knowledge is explained as being possessed by someone who cannot himself formulate the content of the knowledge, but can recognise as correct a formulation of that knowledge when offered to him. Such knowledge is manifested in behaviour, then, partly in terms of the practical abilities that speakers' possess, and partly by a willingness to acknowledge as correct a formulation of what is known when it is presented (Dummett, 1978a, p. 96). Characterising speakers' knowledge as such can then be seen as registering what is absent with causally conditioned behaviour. The relevant behaviour is indeed open to outward view since it is partly manifested in terms of practical abilities. But we have more than we do in the Skinner box experiments because speakers are in possession of knowledge that guides their behaviour which, although incapable of being formulated and brought to mind by the speakers themselves, is capable of being acknowledged as correct by speakers as what guides their practice (McDowell, 1987, p. 95). This might then be seen as capturing the rationality of language at the fundamental levels when it is described in Dummett's desired non-semantic terms, and as being something to akin to saying that the builders have some sort of basic normative understanding regarding their behaviour.

Characterising the knowledge possessed by speakers as being implicit or tacit was rejected on the basis that it is unexplanatory in understanding what form a speaker's knowledge is delivered, which is what matters for philosophy as opposed to psychology (Dummett, 1993, p. xi). Dummett still held on to the idea that the notions of knowledge and

understanding are ineliminable, and attributions of them should be taken seriously, however. If introducing such notions was used to distance himself from McDowell's accusations of not capturing the rationality of language, as it seems they were, regardless of how he ultimately wishes to characterise that knowledge, the difference between the builders and ourselves at the ground level is simply a difference in the complexity of the practice we are engaged in. They are both of a similar conceptual level in that they are both normative rule-governed activities, where the practitioner's have some sort of awareness or knowledge that saves the practice from collapsing into one that is causally induced. The only difference between the builders and ourselves at the ground level would be that there is a structure of entitlements in our language that is absent with the builders. It is not to be seen in the fact that the builder language-game is, conceptually, a totally different practice to the one we are engaged in, as it would be for McDowell. Instead the notion of use at the ground level would be neither behaviouristic nor semantic or intentional, but would be construed in terms of the entitlements of speakers and language-entry rules. This notion of use would therefore be one concerned with social norms but which is not semantic in nature. The practice would then be embedded within other non-linguistic activities through its usage of language-entry rules, just as the builders primitive practice is embedded within the non-linguistic activity of building:

...what Wittgenstein conceived of as constituting an account of the use of language is illustrated by the "language-games" which he described in the *Brown Book* and elsewhere. In these, some rudimentary language, or fragment of a language conceived of as existing in isolation, is displayed as being actually spoken: what is described is the complex of activities with which utterances of sentences of the language are interwoven; and, again, the description does not invoke psychological or semantic concepts, but is couched entirely in terms of what is open to outward view.

This conception of a language-game illustrates for us what Wittgenstein would consider to be an adequate account of the functioning of an entire actual language: such an account would, again, consist of a description of the language-game in which the language played a rôle, and would differ in principle from those described by Wittgenstein only in its immensely greater complexity. It is important to notice the difference between this idea and the conception of a theory of meaning that can be derived from Frege. Both are agreed that what is required is a description of the conventional principles which govern the *practice* of speaking the language, a description which does not invoke the notion of a

sentence's expressing a thought, but, rather, displays that which renders any given sentence the expression of a particular thought.

...For Wittgenstein... it is essential to our language that its employment is interwoven with our non-linguistic activities. In the language-games which he describes, what confers meaning on the linguistic utterances is their immediate and direct connection with other actions; for instance, the builder asks for a certain number of stones of a certain shape, and they are passed to him. What makes it difficult for us to see that it is *use*, in this sense, which confers meaning on the sentences of our actual language, or, better, in which their meaning consists, is the remoteness of the connection between linguistic activities (for example, that on which I am now engaged) and non-linguistic ones; it is nevertheless this connection which endows our words with the meanings they have.

Now this idea, striking as it is as a first and, if correct, fundamental, insight, remains in Wittgenstein largely programmatic (Dummett, 1975b, p. 446-447).

This passage from Dummett discusses his understanding of Wittgenstein's builder language-game. Setting aside whether it provides the correct reading of Wittgenstein's ideas, it is informative, nonetheless, to consider Dummett's take on it. What he suggests is that the notion of use that would be congenial to Wittgenstein is one that is neither semantic nor intentional, and the practices he is considering in his examples are interwoven with other non-linguistic activities such as those of building. It is these non-linguistic activities that confer the meanings onto items used in a language, and describing them brings into view what it is for any given sentence to express the particular thought it does. The builder language-game is being used as a model to suggest the type of account that Wittgenstein would want to provide for an entire language. The difference between the builders and ourselves is simply a difference in complexity, on this reading of Wittgenstein. Again, this is understood not in terms of the fact that the builders are engaged in a radically different type of activity to full-blown language, but rather because their practice is more primitive and language would comprise a vast number of builder-type language-games. This is certainly the reading that Dummett gives regarding Wittgenstein's language-games. It is less clear whether he advocates all the ideas expressed himself in what I have cited, given that he hedges his bets at the end regarding his understanding of Wittgenstein's notion of use. However what he looks to reject in his reading of Wittgenstein is that the meanings of all sentences can be directly given in terms of their connections with non-linguistic activities:

...an assertoric utterance is not, in the general case, aimed at evoking a specific response; how the hearer responds will depend on many things, in particular upon his desire and his existing beliefs. That is not to deny that an assertion will often have effects upon behaviour, and, in the long run, upon non-verbal behaviour; but it does cast doubt upon the possibility of giving an account of the meanings of assertoric sentences directly in terms of their connections with non-linguistic activities (Dummett, 1975b, p. 448).

Setting this disagreement aside, it looks as though there is indeed little difference between the builders and how Dummett understands what is going on at the ground level with full-blown language. Many of the thoughts that he attributes to Wittgenstein are in fact ones that we have seen him explicitly endorse. Dummett is right to say that Wittgenstein does not construe use in semantic or intentional terms with the builders (but that is because such notions would not be appropriate here) and that is something he agrees with for the ground level. The builders practice is interwoven into the non-linguistic activity of building, and Dummett accommodates something similar in his use of language-entry rules for his preferred meaning-theory, and language-exit rules for a pragmatist one, even if the meanings of all the sentences of a language are not given in terms of such direct connections to non-linguistic activities. The notion of a sentence expressing a thought is not invoked by Wittgenstein in his language-games (again, this is because that notion would not be appropriate for those practices), and, as we saw McDowell note in 3.2, Dummett's thinks that an illuminating account of a language must ultimately describe what is in fact the practice of thought-expression, but in other terms (McDowell, 1997, p.111).

In the previous chapter, it was noted that concept possession is not in the picture for the builders, and neither are the notions of truth and content or rationality, though the vocabulary that is adequate to describe the behaviour of the builders would have to be normative, rather than merely causal. If that vocabulary is one that fits a practice that does not have the concepts we are interested in, however, then where is the certainty that a vocabulary that lies at the same conceptual level, construed in terms of the entitlements of speakers, will be adequate enough to capture those concepts and rationality? Again, the real danger is that Dummett's account will simply view speakers' linguistic behaviour as being a complex form of vocalisation akin to the builders. Although the addition of taking speakers'

knowledge of their language seriously is an attempt to incorporate rationality into the account, it takes us no further than when we acknowledge that the builders are responding to the calls they hear with understanding and awareness. Adding this ingredient to the account will not magic the central concepts that concern the philosophy of language and rationality into the picture. Nor would saying that full-blown language is more complex in the sense that it comprises a vast number of builder-type language-games. If the central notions and rationality are not present in the builder's activity, then adding more of such activities to form a collection of them will not bring those notions into the picture. The behaviour of the participants of such an activity would still be far too rigid at the ground level. As I said when discussing Dummett's chess analogy, if the behaviour is too rigid at this level from which the rest of the molecular account is based, in giving its answers to the meanings and competency of items in a language, then the problem will infect upwards and contaminate the rest of the account as well. Whatever problems that are located at the ground level will be problems that is inherent throughout the account.

5.4. Conclusion

Dummett's attempt to avoid behaviourism and modesty is, then, unsuccessful. The ineliminable use of knowledge and understanding within a meaning-theory is Dummett's attempt to ensure that the account avoids behaviourism and incorporates the rationality of language. The account does indeed offer more than we find with the mere conditioned behaviour of animals in the Skinner box experiments that have been trained to press a lever when they see a red light. The builders, too, belong to a level that is above these animals, in that they are engaged in some sort of primitive, normative practice and respond to the calls they hear with an awareness that their behaviour is appropriate or "fits". However, when discussing the builders, it is difficult to find a satisfactory label for the understanding they possess. It is more than conditioned response, but less than responding to reasons as reasons. This same difficulty in finding a suitable account of the understanding and awareness that speakers of a language possess afflicts Dummett's meaning-theory as well, and he leaves this thread hanging, without providing a promising line of thought about it.

The analogy with the builders is an attempt to bring out the fact that there might be a level of description that falls between the causally induced behaviour of animals and a

practice described in semantic and intentional terms. Dummett, however, has an unfounded certainty that a vocabulary that lies between these two levels can recover concepts that are the primary focus of the philosophy of language that are bound up with rationality within his theory of force. If the vocabulary adequately fits a practice where content, truth, assertion, etc. are absent, can it fit one where they are present and be used to reconstruct such concepts? I have answered this question negatively. Dummett's resultant position looks to make language out as being something akin to a more complex version of Wittgenstein's builders which would mean that he is unable to adhere to his own contention that language is the rational activity par excellence. If language is to be made out as being conceptually a totally different practice to the practice of the builders, then the vocabulary used to describe it has to be conceptually richer in order to appropriately characterise the behaviour of its participants. This applies equally to the case of the builders themselves whose behaviour cannot be characterised in causal terms that would be adequate for the Skinner box experiments. In advancing up the conceptual levels (from the casually induced behaviour of the pigeons in the Skinner box experiments, to the normative, rule-governed behaviour of Wittgenstein's builders and finally to the behaviour of possessors of a language) the vocabulary used to describe that behaviour has to advance as well in order to appropriately characterise what is going on. Dummett wants to resist this thought by describing language in normative, and not semantic or intentional terms, but this will bring the practice down to the level of the builders. Dummett's strong contention that a meaning-theory should be reductionist cannot be sustained, then.

Chapter 6

Davidson's Middle Way

6.0. Introduction

Donald Davidson's work in the philosophy of language should be read as falling between the two extremes of Dummett and McDowell on the "full-bloodedness-modesty" spectrum. In chapter 2, I outlined McDowell's modesty and argued that his strong contention, that a meaning-theory should only provide trivial explanations regarding the meanings and competency of items in a language, should be rejected. It is because McDowell advocates a modest meaning-theory that he thinks there is no issue regarding the incompatibility between the truth-conditional conception of meaning and a minimalist conception of truth. Chapter 3 outlined Dummett's commitment to "maximal" full-bloodedness, while chapter 4 sketched his meaning-theory which will be molecular and justificationist in nature. Such a meaning-theory is one that not only aims to achieve non-triviality regarding the meanings and competency of items in a language but is also one that is reductionist in nature. Dummett's desire for non-triviality, and his claim that truth and meaning should be explained together, is why he makes his incompatibility argument. Even though I agree with Dummett that non-triviality is desirable and should be aimed for, and truth and meaning are so intimately bound up with one another that they can only be explained together, his commitment to reductionism is untenable. The reason for this, as argued in chapter 5, is that a reductionist account will not be able to reconstruct the central concepts within the theory of force and make language out as being inherently rational. Instead the resultant position will make language out as being a complex form of vocalisation akin to Wittgenstein's builder language-game.

Both Dummett and McDowell fall short, then, in establishing their strong contentions regarding the form that a meaning-theory should take and instead show the need for something less than their extremes. The position they jointly dictate is, in fact, the very position that we should read Davidson as occupying. This is an interpretation of Davidson's work that is contrary to how McDowell reads it, who sees Davidson as sharing a commitment to modesty. Dummett also initially did the same in "What is a Theory of Meaning? (I)", though he came to correct his mistake in the appendix to that paper. There Dummett reads Davidson, correctly, as sharing a desire for non-triviality. However, it is still unclear whether Dummett understands Davidson's overall position properly. Davidson looks to reject Dummett's assumption that a meaning-theory will take some *one* concept as central from which the whole practice of language can be described. On the truth-conditional conception, this would be the concept of truth. Although Davidson in his early phase did indeed take this position, it came to be supplanted by something more akin to McDowell's conceptual geography where content is given to those concepts by locating them within an account that makes speakers out as rationally intelligible. This then places Dummett's overall contention, which he maintained throughout his work, that truth is the one central concept on the truth-conditional conception under strain if its two main proponents, McDowell and Davidson, reject this view. McDowell, on the other hand, is clear in how he reads Davidson as shedding light on the central concepts. For he sees Davidson's holism simply as the position which takes the central concepts as being so interconnected with one another that there is no hope to take any one of those concepts as fundamental to explain the others. Although this is indeed true of Davidson, his holism also relates to how we can provide non-trivial answers as to in virtue of what particular items mean what they do and what it is to be competent with those items. This aspect of Davidson's account is one that McDowell simply ignores and results in his fault in failing to read Davidson unmodestly.

In reading Davidson as occupying a conceptual space between Dummett and McDowell, one problem that has to be faced is that it is hard to see how Davidson can be read as both endorsing a position similar to McDowell's conceptual geography whilst also being able to claim that since "the concept of truth is central to the theory, we are justified in saying that truth is a crucially important explanatory concept" (Davidson, 1990, p. 313). The

way that I propose to reconcile this tension, and outline how the concepts of truth and meaning are given body and content on Davidson's account, is by looking at how he has the resources to avoid Dummett's incompatibility argument. What I will suggest is that even though Davidson aims for non-triviality, endorses the truth-conditional conception of meaning and has sympathies for a minimalist conception of truth, it is by using the concept of truth through a notion of use construed in terms of the attitude of "holding-true" to achieve non-triviality that he is immune from Dummett's argument regarding the incompatibility.

The structure of the chapter will be as follows. In 6.1, I provide an outline of Davidson's move away from taking the concept of truth as the one central concept upon which the whole explanatory burden fell, towards a more McDowellian attitude of giving content to the central concepts by reflecting on how they must hang together for intelligibility of others to be possible at all. This change of tact from Davidson signalled a greater emphasis in considering the process of "radial interpretation", and 6.2 will detail the conditions and constraints that Davidson places upon this process. In 6.3, I provide a reading of Davidson's holism, based upon Dummett's corrected stance taken in the appendix to "What is a Theory of Meaning? (I)", that goes against McDowell's modest reading of Davidson. This reading sees the attitude of "holding-true" as being Davidson's construal of the notion of use that would be used to explain in virtue of what particular items mean what they do and what it is to be competent with those items non-trivially. Holism enters into the picture by seeing the holding-true of every sentence as partially constitutive of the meaning and competency of each item of the language. Finally in 6.4. I make a distinction between the expressibility of the notion of truth within a language and its role and expressibility as from "outside" that language. This is important in understanding Davidson's strategy and the role he gives to the concept of truth in the attitude of holding-true. The minimalist conception of truth (as opposed to a minimalist *theory* of truth) is taken as being expressed in McDowell's identity conception of truth which relates truth to assertoric content. Davidson also has considerable sympathies with such a minimalist conception of truth. This truistic account of truth is seen as being appropriate when considering the expressibility of the concept of truth within a language by relying on a benefit of a competence of the language in question. However we can also see that the

concept of truth is connected with that of assertion in a way that does not concern its expressibility within a language in that to assert is to accept something as-true. By drawing a distinction between these two different ways we may encounter the concept of truth in a meaning-theory, I show how Davidson has the resources to avoid Dummett's incompatibility argument. This will be used to understand how the concepts of truth and meaning are given body and content on Davidson's account.

6.1. Davidson's Move Towards McDowell's Conceptual Geography

Davidson, in his early papers in the philosophy of language, originally set out to turn the explanatory strategy of Tarski on its head. Instead of assuming the concept of meaning, through that of translation in Convention T, to analyse truth as Tarski did, Davidson had the reverse in mind. He assumed the concept of truth as the one central primitive and, by detailing its structure in a truth theory by providing specifications of truth-conditions for a languages' sentences, he wanted to "get at" meaning (Davidson, 1984, p. xiv). This strategy, however, changed in his later papers because of difficulties it faced in providing not only true but "meaning-giving" theorems that correctly specify the meanings of sentences of a language. Instead Davidson shifted towards a more McDowellian position I outlined in 2.4 where the aim is to not explain or analyse the concept of meaning in terms of an independent purchase on the concept of truth alone. The central concepts that concern the philosophy of language are instead understood by looking at the form of a heterophonic theory and how we could test the theory for its correctness against native speakers. The aim of the theory is to make native speakers out as rationally intelligible. Such a procedure uses semantic and intentional concepts, so there is no aspiration for reductionism. However, Davidson's radical interpreter does not assume in advance a competence of the target language when he explains the correctness of the meaning-theory, contrary to McDowell's modesty. The central concepts that concern the philosophy of language can only be understood together, as they are on McDowell's account, which leads to Davidson's requirement that a meaning-theory should be combined with decision theory. Content is given to the central concepts, for Davidson, by looking at the conditions and constraints placed upon a theory that makes native speakers out as rational intelligible by assigning content to their utterances and psychological states simultaneously, without assuming in advance an understanding of either. The current section will outline Davidson's move away

from taking the concept of truth as the one central primitive and towards a more McDowellian position, while the next section will outline the conditions and constraints Davidson places upon his theory of radical interpretation that will allow us to see where Davidson comes apart from McDowell in 6.3.

The original strategy of Davidson was to firmly place the explanatory weight on the concept of truth by taking it as the one central primitive of the theory so as to explain, analyse or reconstruct the problematic concept of meaning in terms of an independent purchase on the concept of truth alone. That Davidson was doing this was something that he only gradually realised (Davidson, 1984, p. xiv), and what it meant was that in viewing a theory of truth as serving as a meaning-theory for a language it required Davidson to rephrase Tarski's Convention T so that it no longer appealed to the concept of meaning through that of translation. Instead an acceptable theory of truth must entail:

..., for every sentence *s* of the object language, a sentence of the form: *s* is true if and only if *p*, where "*p*" is replaced by any sentence that is true if and only if *s* is. Given this formulation, the theory is tested by evidence that T-sentences are simply true; we have given up the idea that we must also tell whether what replaces "*p*" translates *s* (Davidson, 1973, p. 134).

As we saw in 2.4, the difficulty with this explanatory strategy is that by not assuming the notion of translation but only the concept of truth, Davidson's rephrasing of Convention T places a fairly weak condition on truth theories if they are to serve as meaning-theories. It allows for the possibility for a theory to satisfy that adequacy condition and to issue only true, but not meaning-giving, T-sentences as theorems. The problem was sought to be avoided by emphasising the fact that a meaning-theory has to systematically specify a true T-sentence for every sentence of the language from a collection of axioms. This condition makes it hard to see how a true but not meaning-giving T-sentence, like "'Snow is white' is true if and only if grass is green", could be generated from a theory that met that condition. Such a theorem would only ever result from a theory that assigned "snow" with grass and "white" with green things. Although a true T-sentence is yielded in the particular case being considered, false T-sentences would be generated elsewhere and so such a truth theory would be ruled out as failing to meet the conditions set upon it if it is to serve as a meaning-theory.

Placing this formal condition on truth theories does not, however, rule out the cases that Foster highlights, which join any contingently true sentence to the axioms of the theory which govern the predicates of the language (Foster, 1976, p. 13). This allows for the possibility for a theory to pass Davidson's Convention T *and* to preserve truth for all the T-sentences derivable from the theory, but which does not issue in meaning-giving theorems. For example, the theory could have as an axiom: "For all a, 'x is white' is true of a if and only if a is white and the earth moves". This would then allow us to generate the theorem: "'Snow is white' is true if and only if snow is white and the earth moves". This theorem does not specify the meaning of the sentence "Snow is white" yet it would be part of a theory that preserved truth for all the T-sentences issued because whenever something satisfies the predicate "is white" it will also be true that the earth moves.

Davidson, in reply to Foster, pointed out that this problem is avoided due to the fact that since he was "treating theories of truth as empirical theories, the axioms and theorems [have] to be viewed as laws" (Davidson, 1984, p. xiv). That is, because truth theories have an empirical side to them in which their correctness is determined by instances of native speakers holding-true sentences, the theorems are not to be taken as merely true but as capable of supporting counterfactual claims (Davidson, 1976, p. 174). This was something else that Davidson gradually saw, and signals his greater interest in testing the correctness of meaning-theories against native speakers. What it means is that a theorem like "'Snow is white' is true if and only if snow is white" is correct because it is counterfactual supporting. If the speaker were to hold-true the sentence "Snow is white", then he would believe that snow is white. On the other hand the possible theorem "'Snow is white' is true if and only if snow is white and the earth moves" is not counterfactual supporting and so would not be law like. For a speaker might well hold-true the sentence "Snow is white" but would not believe a contingently true matter like the earth moving. This solution for ruling out none meaning-giving theorems is insufficient, however. As Scott Soames highlighted (1989), instead of adding any contingently true sentence to the axioms of the theory, which a speaker may be liable to not believe, we can instead add something that all speakers will be sure to believe, like $1+1=2$. The resulting theorems will now be "'Snow is white" is true if and only if snow is white and $1+1=2$ ", which will be counterfactual supporting. Whenever a speaker holds-true the sentence "Snow is white", they will believe that snow is white and

1+1=2. There is nothing in what Davidson has said so far that rules out such none meaning-giving theorems over those that are genuinely meaning-giving.

These problems that this explanatory strategy faced are the reasons why Davidson's reflections on "radical interpretation" became more and more emphasised in his later work. Radical interpretation encompasses his considerations on constructing a meaning-theory for a previously unknown language and testing its correctness. Davidson's working out of such ideas signalled a departure from taking the concept of truth as the *one* basic, central primitive in terms of which the whole explanatory burden fell. Instead truth became only one concept among a host of others that are intertwined with rationality, such as those of belief, desire, assertion, etc. These concepts were seen in his later work as being so intertwined with one another and rationality that we cannot hope to analyse or define any of them in terms one or two of the others taken as basic. Nor can we reduce them to something more behaviouristic, neurological or physiological (Davidson, 1990, p. 315). Instead we must understand them all together, not by starting from a position below them all and working our way up towards them, but by looking at the form of a meaning-theory whose correctness is confirmed by an approach that allows us to assign content to a speakers' linguistic acts *at the same time* that it provides an understanding of their beliefs, desires, intentions, etc. (Davidson, 1974, p. 146). This is how McDowell understands Davidson's holism:

As I understand the holism Davidson accepts, it is this: attributions of content to sentences in a community's language, to their linguistic acts, and to their psychological states are systematically interlocked, in such a way that – to put it in our present terms – there is no explaining, "as from outside" the entire system, what it means to ascribe some specific content to an appropriate item. Clearly this entails repudiating any aspiration to be anything but modest in theories of meaning (McDowell, 1987, p. 103).

Davidson is indeed clear that facts about what someone believes, intends, desires, etc. are not independent from facts about what their words mean (Davidson, 1974, p. 153). He is therefore in agreement with McDowell in this respect that linguistic concepts are of equal conceptual status to those that concern psychological states and that "an analysis of linguistic meaning that assumes prior identification of nonlinguistic purposes or intentions will be radically incomplete" (Davidson, 1990, pp. 315-316). A meaning-theory should then

be construed as being a complete account of speakers' lives that attempts to make rational sense of their behaviour, both linguistic and non-linguistic, by simultaneously providing specifications of the meanings of sentences of a language and content to the psychological states of speakers. This would be achieved by embedding a meaning-theory within Bayesian decision theory (Davidson, 1990). Bayesian decision theory, as developed by F.P. Ramsey, deals with two of the psychological states of speakers; their beliefs and desires. Decision theory of this sort shows how to make sense of an agent's behaviour – why they choose one course of action over another and why they prefer one situation rather than another – by relating his actions to his beliefs and desires. Such behaviour is based upon the value placed on the various possible consequences and how likely those consequences are deemed to be, given that the action is performed or the situation obtains. Ramsey shows how to detail, from an agent's choice behaviour (his ordinal preferences among outcomes), his beliefs and desires which can then be used to explain an agent's actions. By embedding a meaning-theory within decision theory, Davidson thinks that the account can give content to the concepts of belief, desire, truth and assertion.

Davidson also maintains that not only is there no conceptual asymmetry between linguistic concepts and ones concerned with the psychological states of speakers, there is also no epistemological asymmetry either in the process of assigning content to such psychological states from those of linguistic acts in radical interpretation. Facts relating to the content of psychological states would be no more accessible to someone trying to provide specifications of content to actual and possible linguistic acts precisely because the facts that constitute both are not independent from one another. The content of both linguistic acts and psychological states are constituted by facts about use. In this sense, Davidson agrees with Dummett and McDowell in accepting the "meaning is determined by use" slogan. The process of assigning content and confirming the correctness of a meaning-theory has to rely on "data" that is available to the radical interpreter before he understands the content of either particular linguistic acts or the psychological states of speakers. This idea, that the "data" available to the radical interpreter which determines the correctness of the theory, is just the idea that it is facts about native speakers' use of items in the language that confirm whether the meaning-theory is correct. It is such facts that underpin our answers as to what it is for items of the language to mean what they do; "The ultimate

evidence, as opposed to a criterion, for the correctness of a theory of truth must lie in available facts about how speakers use the language” (Davidson, 1990, p. 301).

Moving the burden of explanatory weight away from the concept of truth in this manner opened up a solution to the sorts of problems that Foster and Soames highlight. The facts that the theory would have to appeal to in order to make sense of speakers’ linguistic acts and psychological states would have to be publicly available facts about the use of items in the language. Since the content of linguistic acts are determined by facts about use, and such acts are inherently bound up with psychological states, speakers’ beliefs must also be determined by what is publicly available in terms of facts about use as well (Heck, 2007b, p. 356). This then rules out Foster and Soames’s counterexamples of none meaning-giving theorems because if the project is to make sense of speakers’ linguistic acts and psychological states simultaneously, and both are determined by readily available facts about use, then a true truth theory arrived at from such facts will always be able to provide correct specifications of content. Rogue, incorrect theorems can always eventually be ruled out because the facts that constitute the phenomena we are interested in are constitutively available to outward view. Nothing is hidden, as it were, that would prevent us from providing meaning-giving theorems if meaning and content are constituted by facts about public use.

The process of radical interpretation is used by Davidson to solve the problem as to how we can gain an understanding of these interdependent central concepts and rationality whilst also providing something sufficiently revealing regarding them. As we saw in 2.3, McDowell sees the value of looking at the form of heterophonic meaning-theories and coming to understand speakers of a previously unknown language as bringing out more of the substance involved in his claim that a meaning-theory should make rational sense of speakers. Reflecting on the form of heterophonic theories does this by seeing how a meaning-theory must cohere within a complete “anthropological” account of the total lives of speakers and seeing what concepts would need be to be brought to bear in this process. Light is then shed by locating such concepts with one another within this account. Davidson also expresses a similar ambition regarding his reflections on radical interpretation by rejecting reductionism as well as a linear order of explanation in which the concept of truth alone is used to explain or analyse the concept of meaning. Instead it is by seeing how the

central concepts must hang together for rational intelligibility of others to be possible at all that we provide such concepts with content:

I have been engaged in a conceptual exercise aimed at revealing the dependencies among our basic propositional attitudes at a level fundamental enough to avoid the assumption that we can come to grasp them – or intelligibly attribute them to others – one at a time. Performing the exercise has required showing how it is in principle possible to arrive at all of them at once. Showing this amounts to presenting an informal proof that we have endowed thought, desire and speech with a structure that makes interpretation possible. Of course, we knew it was possible in advance. The philosophical question was, *what* make it possible?

What makes the task practicable at all is the structure the normative character of thought, desire, speech, and action imposes on correct attributions of attitudes to others, and hence on interpretations of their speech and explanations of their actions... The way to improve our understanding of such understanding is to improve our grasp of the standards of rationality implicit in all interpretation of thought and action (Davidson, 1990, p. 325).

6.2. Radical Interpretation

Although Davidson agrees with McDowell that it is by looking at how we could construct a meaning-theory for a previously unknown language that we bring out more of the substance involved in making speakers out as rationally intelligible, he disagrees with him in one important respect and that concerns the issue of modesty and full-bloodedness. McDowell not only advocates modesty but he also, incorrectly, reads Davidson as sharing this ambition. Although Davidson does not share Dummett's desire for maximal full-bloodedness by wanting to reduce the central concepts to those of a lower conceptual level, he does want to provide non-trivial explanations about in virtue of what particular items mean what they do and what it is to be competent with those items. McDowell's failure to read Davidson in a full-blooded manner results from not seeing Davidson's holism in the appropriate light. In order to approach this issue, the current section will outline the conditions and constraints that Davidson places upon the process of radical interpretation and the role that the notion of use, construed in terms of the attitude of "holding-true", plays. The next section will provide a proper understanding of the significance of Davidson's holism as it relates to his full-blooded account.

As we saw in chapter 2, McDowell is perfectly happy to assume a competence of the target language when he explains the correctness of a meaning-theory. This is shown in how he characterises the notion of use which is construed in terms of the very thoughts that

sentences of the language can express. Davidson, on the other hand, is clear that he wants to characterise the facts that the radical interpreter appeals to that underpins the correctness of the meaning-theory in terms that do not presuppose an understanding of the content of particular sentences. He understands the process of the radical interpreter as a procedure as to how he can assign content to a foreign speakers' psychological states and linguistic acts from a position of not already knowing the content of his beliefs, desires and assertions, etc. It is by reflecting on this process that we explain the correctness of the meaning-theory. Davidson's reason for not presupposing a competence of the target language is precisely because he wants to provide something that is sufficiently revealing regarding the central concepts by not trivialising the idea that meaning is determined by use. When we are looking to provide a philosophical understanding of the concept of meaning, what we are looking at is what it is that gives the sounds we utter and the marks we use to have the character they do. The methodology of looking at the form of a meaning-theory is designed to give us an approach to tackle such questions which relate to the general concept of meaning. It seems that Davidson agrees that such an approach will only be philosophically revealing if we do not trivialise our answers regarding the meanings of particular items that belong to the language:

What is it for words to mean what they do? In the essays collected here I explore the idea that we would have an answer to this question if we knew how to construct a theory satisfying two demands: it would provide an interpretation of all utterances, actual and potential, of a speaker or group of speakers; and it would be verifiable without knowledge of the detailed propositional attitudes of the speakers. The second condition aims to prevent smuggling into the foundations of the theory concepts too closely allied to the concept of meaning. A theory that does not satisfy both conditions cannot be said to answer our opening question in a philosophically instructive way (Davidson, 1984, p. xiii).

Instead Davidson construes use in terms of what sentences speakers hold-true (or "prefer-true", once he thought that a theory of verbal interpretation should be unified with decision theory) which he takes to be an attitude towards a sentence that someone engaged in radical interpretation can recognise and identify in a speaker before the interpreter has an understanding of the content of the sentence or of a detailed understanding of their beliefs. It is therefore a sentential rather than a propositional attitude. He originally stated that use should be understood in non-semantic, non-linguistic terms: "If an acceptable theory could

be supported by such evidence, that would constitute conceptual progress, for the theory would be specifically semantical in nature, while the evidence would be described in non-semantical terms" (Davidson, 1974, p. 142). Such comments, which are frequent in his early work, look to imply that Davidson sought some sort of reduction of the semantic and linguistic to the non-semantic and non-linguistic. He later stated that his aim was *not* to avoid using intentional notions, since holding-true is an attitude towards a sentence and it is to believe the sentence. Instead it was to avoid using "*individuating* intentional states. *Intensional* states, states with (as one says) a propositional object" (Davidson, 1990, p. 323).

Misunderstanding Davidson's claims that he is willing to allow intentional notions, but not ones which are semantic or linguistic, might make it look as though he wants to analyse the semantic and linguistic in terms of the non-linguistic beliefs of speakers. However, by characterising use in terms of an intentional attitude which is not "*individuating*", Davidson avoids taking a "*Griceian*" notion of use which concerns the content of the psychological states of speakers. A Griceian notion of use would be one that is construed in terms of the content of speakers' psychological states. What it is for the sentence "Snow is white" to mean what it does would be explained, on this construal of use, in terms of the speaker having the intention that his audience should come to believe he believed that snow is white. Although Davidson is attributing an intentional, psychological state to a speaker when he says that he is holding-true a sentence, an interpreter is making that attribution without knowing the content of that state. It is this that separates his construal of use from one that could be possibly Griceian. The denial that we should characterise use in a Griceian manner stems from the fact that there is no conceptual priority between the psychological states of speakers and their linguistic acts. Contrary to what Davidson says, then, there should be no reluctance to employ specifically semantic or linguistic concepts within the theory either. His original claim regarding the non-semantic character of the evidence also looks to run contrary to the idea that truth is a non-reducible, explanatory concept within a meaning-theory.

The notion of holding-true a sentence plays the role of allowing a radical interpreter to work his way into the content of the psychological states of speakers and their linguistic acts simultaneously. Davidson tells us that speakers hold-true sentences because of two things; what the sentence means and what the speaker believes (Davidson, 1974, p. 142). If a

speaker holds-true the sentence "Snow is white" it is because the sentence means that snow is white and they believe that snow is white. The interdependence of psychological states and linguistic acts means that if we knew what sentence a speaker holds-true and we knew what belief a speaker had, we could work out the content of the sentence, or, alternatively, if we knew the content of the sentence, we could work out what belief a speaker has.

However, the point of radical interpretation is that we are deprived detailed knowledge of either (Davidson, 1973, p. 135). The solution, Davidson tells us, is to say that in coming to understand speakers of a foreign language, we have to assume that we have access to what situations in the world cause speakers to hold-true sentences (Davidson, 1990, p. 322).

For example, if we were trying to construct a meaning-theory for German from scratch, and we wanted to understand an observation sentence like "Es regnet", we have to have access to the circumstances and situations in which that sentence is typically held-true by speakers. These circumstances can be identified before we have an understanding of the content of the sentence or of the belief that results in the hold-true attitude. We now observe that speakers typically hold-true that sentence in circumstances in which it is raining. This then allows us to give a description, from a particular observation, of the form:

(E) Kurt is a German speaker and Kurt holds-true "Es regnet" on Saturday at noon and it is raining near Kurt on Saturday at noon

We now have some reason to think that it is because German speakers believe that it is raining that means they hold-true the sentence "Es regnet". This allows us to tentatively infer from (E) a more generalised claim that:

(GE) If x is a German speaker, then x holds-true "Es regnet" at t if and only if it is raining near x at t

Once we have observed speakers of the language sufficiently enough in various circumstances to commit ourselves to the move from (E) to (GE), we can take (GE) as confirming the correctness of the theorem:

(T) "Es regnet" is true when spoken by x at t if and only if it is raining near x at t

In order to identify the circumstances in the world that speakers' beliefs and utterances are directed at in their hold-true attitudes, we have to assume that foreign speakers respond and take as obvious those features of the world that we would also respond and take as obvious were we in those circumstance as well. That is, we have to project ourselves into the position of those speakers and assume that they generally hold-true what we, the theorist/interpreter, would hold-true were we in those environmental situations. This requires us to "hold belief constant as far as possible while solving meaning" (Davidson, 1973, p. 137), in that we have to attribute to speakers very general beliefs about their environment that they ought to have, and what they ought to believe in particular situations is judged by our own standards of what is obvious and rational because, of course, we have no other standard by which to judge them with. This agreement in the hold-true attitudes at this basic level between us and the speakers we are trying to understand allows us to begin to work our way into an account that makes them out as being rationally intelligible by imposing normative requirements to their beliefs that makes their behaviour understandable in light of the environmental circumstances of their utterances. However, given the restrictions Davidson places on the process of radical interpretation, our assumptions about what speakers of the target language ought to believe cannot be about *specific* beliefs. That would mean that we already have a detailed understanding of the beliefs of speakers. Instead, the assumptions about what speakers ought to believe have to concern more general features of belief (Evnine, 1991, p. 102), such as they believe the obvious.

In moving from (GE) to (T), we move from what it is held-true to what is true. To do this, Davidson makes another crucial assumption, that sentences which are held-true by speakers are, indeed, typically true. Together, these two assumptions mean that we must assign "truth-conditions to alien sentences that make native speakers right when plausibly possible, according, of course, to our own view of what is right" (Davidson, 1973, p. 137). These are the basic assumptions, then, that Davidson makes; that speakers of the target language should believe what we, by and large, take as being rational to believe in our basic observational beliefs, and that speakers are mostly right in what they believe. This allows us to use information about which basic observation sentences are held-true under particular circumstances as evidence for a truth theory that says under what conditions those sentences

are true as a way of specifying their meaning. Without assuming that speakers are mostly correct in their beliefs in these basic cases, we sever the link between situations in the world and speakers' hold-true attitudes, and it is precisely this link that allows the task of coming to understand a foreign language to be tractable at all. If speakers of a foreign language are regularly false in what they believe, their hold-true attitudes will make it difficult for us to make sense of what they are saying and believe. Too much error will leave us in a position in which we cannot use the context of their utterances as anything to go on as a way of fixing the content of their assertions and psychological attitudes, which would then make their general behaviour totally unintelligible to us.

The very possibility of Davidson's enterprise of radical interpretation depends, then, upon these assumptions, but it does so because they concern the constitutive nature of being a rational creature with thoughts, beliefs, desires, etc., rather than being guiding principles by which the task is suggested to proceed. What Davidson is saying is that the meaning of a basic observation sentence is determined by its use, where use is construed in terms of speakers' hold-true attitudes. Without being able to correlate circumstances in which observational sentences are uttered and speakers' hold-true attitudes, we cannot understand how speakers are using their sentences, and the inability to do this means that we cannot determine their content. Since meaning is determined by use, an inability to identify the use of sentences would mean that, contrary to what we initially thought, the creatures that we are trying to understand do not in fact assign content to their vocalisations and do not possess psychological states with content:

The methodological advice to interpret in a way that optimizes agreement should not be conceived as resting on a charitable assumption about human intelligence that might turn out to be false. If we cannot find a way to interpret the utterances and other behaviour of a creature as revealing a set of beliefs largely consistent and true by our own standards, we have no reason to count that creature as rational, as having beliefs, or as saying anything (Davidson, 1973, p. 137).

The agreement here in the hold-true attitudes between us and the target speakers applies especially to speakers' attitudes to basic observation sentences, where we seem to have little choice other than to project our own standards of what they ought to hold-true. It would be here that Davidson's project would naturally be seen as beginning, as the casual connections between circumstances in the world and speakers' hold-true attitudes would be

most direct (Joseph, 2004, p. 68). With sentences that are theoretically more complex and are distant from such basic sentences, more room is available to attribute divergent beliefs and ones which we consider as being false without impinging on the rationality we attribute to them. Instead it becomes a matter of making best sense of the target speakers, or maximising intelligibility (Joseph, 2004, p. 69), by making sure we attribute to them the most coherent pattern in their linguistic acts and psychological states in concert with a complete understanding of their behaviour. This allows us to attribute content to items that belong to the language and to the psychological states of speakers that make sense for *them* to believe, even though *we* do not hold-true what they hold-true, given what we have already established about them, their behaviour and their situation in the world. It is, however, only because we would share a large number of beliefs that the process of making sense of their behaviour is possible. Although talking about understanding a single speaker rather than a community of them, Davidson's point that differences in hold-true attitudes only make sense against a massive amount of agreement are equally applicable to understanding a community as they are to an individual:

...of course the fact that a theory does not make speakers universal holders of truths is not an inadequacy of the theory; the aim is not the absurd one of making disagreement and error disappear. The point is rather that widespread agreement is the only possible background against which disputes and mistakes can be interpreted. Making sense of the utterances and behaviour of others, even their most aberrant behaviour, requires us to find a great deal of reason and truth in them. To see too much unreason on the part of others is simply to undermine our ability to understand what it is they are so unreasonable about (Davidson, 1974, p. 153).

Davidson also requires the interpreter to impose his standards of logical coherence onto foreign speakers. This requires placing more normative structure onto their speech and behaviour by demanding that they reason according to the laws of logic. It is also part of the very idea and presumption that we treat speakers of a language as rational beings, and is a condition for us to make attributions of content to their psychological states and linguistic acts that allows us to make sense of their behaviour in the first place; "What makes the task practicable at all is the structure the normative character of thought, desire, speech, and action imposes of correct attributions to others, and hence on interpretations of their speech and explanations of their actions" (Davidson, 1990, p. 325). We could not begin to make

sense of someone's behaviour if they regularly flouted logical laws by agreeing with logical contradictions, say. Obviously speakers of a language are not perfectly rational in the sense given, and will sometimes be guilty of irrationalities, but if we came across a group of speakers that regularly and unwaveringly violated logical laws, we could not begin to make sense of their behaviour in a manner that allowed us to assign truth-conditions to their sentences. This in turn would lead us to the conclusion that whatever else they are doing in making their vocalisations, they are not speaking a language, for possession of a language and rationality are two sides of the same coin and can only be had together.

The reason for this, as we have already seen, concerns the generality constraint. Possession of content allows for a process of reflective reasoning and inferring. The content of a sentence and of a psychological state is partly constituted by its location in a network of other sentences and states. The chicken avoids a caterpillar because it is poisonous, and in that sense, and only in that sense, is it responding to a reason. It does not, however, stand back from the situation and have the capacity to acknowledge that a caterpillar being poisonous is a reason to not eat it. When we are making sense of the behaviour of speakers of a language, we ascribe to them intentions, desires, actions, etc. in a manner that credits them with knowledge of the logical relations that exists between their thoughts. A speaker might avoid eating something that is poisonous because he believes the food is poisonous and he combines this belief with the desire to not get ill. Perhaps he knows that it is poisonous but he eats it anyway because he combines this belief with the desire to fall ill so he can miss work, or maybe that eating it will lead to immunisation.

Beliefs, intentions, and desires are identified, first, by their causal relations to events and objects in the world, and, second, by their relations to one another. A belief that it is about to rain would lose much of its claim to be just *that* belief if it did not have some tendency to cause someone who had it and wanted to stay dry to take appropriate action, such as carrying an umbrella. Nor would a belief that it is about to rain plausibly be identified as such if someone who was thought to have that belief also believed that if it rains it pours and did not believe it was about to pour. And so on: these obvious logical relations amongst beliefs; amongst beliefs, desires, and intentions; between beliefs and the world, make beliefs the beliefs they are; therefore they cannot in general lose these relations and remain the same beliefs. Such relations are *constitutive* of the propositional attitudes (Davidson, 1985, pp. 195-196).

6.3. Davidson's Holism

The above has provided a brief sketch of the conditions and constraints that Davidson places upon the process of radical interpretation. It was not intended as a full and detailed exposition of those ideas, or as providing a critical examination of them, but simply as providing material that will allow us to see where Davidson comes apart from McDowell on the issue of modesty and full-bloodedness in the current section. As has already been noted, McDowell sees Davidson's holism as consisting simply in his advocacy of the inextricability of meaning, belief, desire, assertion, etc. Although the interconnectedness of the central concepts is indeed something that Davidson ardently defends, his holism should also be viewed as contributing to an explanation about in virtue of what particular items mean what they do in a language. McDowell, and Simon Evnine (1991, pp. 129-133) who is another influential commentator on Davidson, are right in saying that the break between Davidson and Dummett lies in the fact that the latter, but not the former, is after a reductive account of the central concepts. This is made clear in the fact that the data that the radical interpreter appeals to in order to explain the correctness of a meaning-theory lies in a notion of use construed in terms of the intentional attitude of holding-true. However Davidson is adamant that even though this notion of use has to be described in intentional terms, it can be construed without appealing to the contents of the psychological states or linguistic acts of speakers. It is also clear that Davidson intends his commitment to holism to have more bite to it than his claims regarding the interconnectedness of the central concepts offers. Together, these two commitments are how Davidson provides a more substantial explanation of the central concepts without being committed to reductionism.

For Davidson, to assert is manifest the attitude of holding-true. The notion of holding-true is, then, the interiorisation of the act of assertion, and by assuming the notion of holding-true Davidson is already assuming the concept of assertion in his account. This allows us to say that the difference between Davidson, Dummett and McDowell concerns what we are allowed to assume regarding notions and concepts from the theory of force. On McDowell's modest account, he appeals to a presupposed competence of the target language and to the notion of the content of assertion in Part 1 of his meaning-theory to explain in virtue of what particular items mean what they do. Dummett, on the other hand, sees that notion as properly belonging to the theory of force, as he wants to reconstruct such

notions and concepts within Part 2 of a meaning-theory from those that are deemed as being of a lower conceptual level. By seeing the attitude of holding-true as the interiorisation of the act of assertion, Davidson appeals to elements from the theory of force, contra Dummett. However he does not already appeal to a competence of the target language and does not read a speaker as asserting *that...* (which would be filled in by a description of the content of the assertion) when he explains the correctness of the theory, contra McDowell. This is the conceptual space where Davidson lies which is located between Dummett and McDowell. It concedes to modesty that an aspiration for reductionism is untenable but it maintains with full-bloodedness that non-triviality should be aimed for.

Reading Davidson in a way in which he seeks non-trivial explanations regarding particular items of a language is discussed by Dummett in his appendix to his paper "What is a Theory of Meaning (I)". In the original paper he read Davidson as advocating modesty, but on reflection he felt that this did not cohere with Davidson's holism. Instead, Dummett outlined a reading of Davidson in which he is seen as proposing non-triviality, and holism comes into the picture as a criterion by which truth theories are judged as being correct, based upon speakers' sentential judgements construed in terms of hold-true attitudes. This revised reading of Davidson is one that better coheres with his overall aspirations and properly connects his holism with his understanding of the "meaning is determined by use" slogan that underpins Davidson's answers to constitutive questions about meaning and competency.

What emerged in Davidson's "Reply to Foster" (1976), when pressed on what it is that an interpreter knows, is that he knows that the axioms and theorems are entailed by an interpretative truth theory which meets Davidson's constraints. As we have seen, one of those constraints is that the theory should maximise the number of sentences held-true as being true. One way to read this is that an interpreter must know the axioms and theorems of the theory and that the theory meets the relevant constraints, including that it maximises the number of held-true sentences as being true. An alternative way is to read it as saying that the interpreter must know the axioms and theorems of the theory, and also know which specific sentences are held-true that are to be made out as being true. The difference is between simply knowing that the axioms and theorems are part of a theory that maximises the sentential judgements of speakers as being true, whatever those held-true sentences are,

and between knowing which *particular* sentences make up the set of sentences observed to be held-true which determine what we assign on the right-hand side of our axioms and theorems.

The second reading is the reading that Dummett gives in his appendix to account for Davidson's holism and he sees it as being a generalisation of what Wittgenstein says about the name "Moses" (Dummett, 1975a, p. 26). On this reading of Wittgenstein, he is seen as saying that there are a number of things which are held-true of Moses; that he led his people out of slavery, that he was brought up in a palace, that he was taken out of the Nile by the Pharaoh's daughter, etc. If there is a unique individual of whom a substantial number of these things are true, then he is the bearer of the name "Moses". If a speaker is to be credited with understanding the name "Moses", then he must know *which* things are held-true of Moses, as opposed to simply knowing the general form of this account – that the name "Moses" denotes an individual of whom a substantial number of sentences held-true are true. Dummett generalises this reading of Wittgenstein to encompass Davidson's holism by saying that Wittgenstein's account can be extended to simultaneously assign the references/extensions to all the words of a language:

In the same way, on a holistic theory, a man cannot be said to know the axiom governing "the Earth", that is, to know that "the Earth" denotes the Earth, if he merely knows that the expression denotes that object which is assigned to "the Earth" under the total assignment to the primitive expressions of English which brings out true the maximum number of sentences generally held true by English speakers, whatever those sentences may be. In knowing that, he knows only the general schema in accordance with which the particular explanation of the use of any singular term, in any language, must be given, and, in addition, no more than that "the Earth" is a singular term of English; he could have that knowledge without knowing anything more about the English language whatever, and could hardly, in such a case, be said to know what "the Earth" meant, or, therefore, the proposition expressed by "'The Earth' denotes the Earth". In order to know the specific meaning of "the Earth", to know the proposition expressed by that axiom, he must know which particular sentences make up the class *T*, relative to which it is determined which total assignment is the preferred one (Dummett, 1975a, pp. 28-29).

That is, the theory will assign referents to names and extensions to predicates under the correct assignment, with a correct assignment being understood in terms of that assignment that makes the maximum number of sentences in the language as being true

when they are held-true. The correctness of the axioms or theorems of the theory are, then, to be judged by the acceptability of the entire theory, which is itself assessed against the total number of hold-true attitudes that the theory relies on to assign references and extensions. The criterion that one *particular* theorem is judged as being correct is exactly the same as the criterion by which any other theorem is judged as being correct – against the total number of hold-true attitudes of speakers– which is the root of Davidson’s holism. Dummett makes a distinction between holism with regards to the evidence and holism with regards to the theory (Dummett, 1975a, p. 25). The distinction looks to be centred on whether Davidson is making an epistemological point with his talk of evidence which would concern how we could come to understand speakers of a foreign language. As opposed to that, holism with regards to theory concerns the constitutive point about the nature of meaning and what it is for items of the language to mean what they do. His use of the word “evidence” and interest in heterophonic theories in radical interpretation are misleading in that it might seem he is only making an epistemological point. However Davidson is committed to a version of the idea that meaning is determined by use, and, as we have seen, use is to be construed in terms of the attitude of holding-true. He is therefore interested in making both epistemological and constitutive claims with his holism. It is also clear that Davidson wants his holism to have more bite than would be given to it if it only concerned the epistemological point.

On this reading, Davidson does have a non-trivial account of the difference between knowing, of a sentence, that it is true and knowing the proposition expressed by the sentence, which was an issue that was discussed in chapter 2 in relation to McDowell’s modesty. The difference between these two pieces of knowledge is that knowing the proposition expressed by the sentence requires knowing what the meaning of the embedded sentence or predicate is, while knowing, of a sentence, that it is true does not. For Davidson, what a speaker knows when he knows the meaning of “is white” is that he knows the relevant axiom that governs that predicate, and he knows that the axiom is entailed from a truth theory for the language that meets Davidson’s constraint of maximising the number of sentences held-true as being true, again where that knowledge is not construed as knowledge of the general principle, but as resting upon knowing the particular sentential judgements of speakers (Dummett, 1987c, p. 243).

6.4. The Structure and Content of Truth

McDowell's reading of Davidson is inaccurate, then, because he fails to locate the true nature of Davidson's holism or see his notion of use, construed in terms of the attitude of holding-true, as being Davidson's way of providing non-trivial explanations about in virtue of what particular items mean what they do and what it is to be competent with those items. However, by endorsing non-triviality, a truth-conditional conception of meaning and having sympathies for a minimalist conception of truth, Davidson looks to face Dummett's claim that there is an incompatibility regarding these ideas when truth and meaning are seen as being explained together within a meaning-theory. Given an acceptance of all these ideas, I argued in 3.4 that Dummett does show that there is a problem regarding their compatibility together.

I have also noted that Davidson's original suggestion was to take the concept of truth as being the one basic concept in order to explain or analyse the concept of meaning. Davidson then moved away from this position to one in which the central concepts are so interconnected with one another that we cannot take any one of them to explain or analyse any of the others. Instead it is by looking at the form of heterophonic meaning-theories from the position of a radical interpreter that we provide such concepts with content. However by shifting his position in this manner, Davidson's contention that truth is a crucially important explanatory concept (Davidson, 1990, p. 313) looks to be placed under strain. As we saw with McDowell's conceptual geography in 2.4, he claims no conceptual illumination from the concept of truth, as no explanatory weight falls upon that concept in his approach. This is his strategy for avoiding any obligation to give a general, substantive account of the concept of truth aside from elucidating that concept in terms of a truistic, platitudinous connection with assertoric content. Indeed McDowell sees his quietist position as moving away from substantial explanations to one of description, in the fashion the later Wittgenstein recommends of assembling reminders of what we already know. It is difficult to see how Davidson can differentiate himself from McDowell in this respect and as lying in a conceptual space between Dummett and McDowell. On the one hand, truth is indeed explanatorily important, but on the other, it cannot be taken as carrying the full burden of explanatory weight.

What this section will argue is that it is by drawing a distinction between the expressibility of the concept of truth within a language and its expressibility as from outside it (which is indeed anticipated in (Dummett, 1973a, p. 460)) that we see that Davidson has the resources to avoid Dummett's argument. A characterisation of truth from outside a language would be an understanding of truth that does not explain that concept in terms of a presupposed competence of a target language. This is how I think we should understand Davidson's notion of holding-true, which, he tells us, is identifiable in the process of radical interpretation before one understands the target language. The notion of holding-true is an intentional attitude and so is a belief, while to assert is to manifest or express this attitude. What this means is that in assuming the notion of holding-true, what Davidson is presupposing is not just the concept of truth but also the concepts of belief and assertion through their interconnected ties with one another (as well as desire when Davidson talks of "preferring-true"). The balance would therefore not tip towards taking the concept as the central primitive. Instead a more purpose-neutral order of things is to see the concepts of truth, assertion and belief as all being given in the attitude of holding-true. Although Davidson himself does not draw this distinction regarding the expressibility of the concept of truth, it is implicit in his work and allows us to see that although a minimalist conception of truth is appropriate when we are considering the concept's expressibility within a target language, a more substantial understanding of that concept is given by seeing how we must use the concept in a project that is absent with McDowell. It is by understanding how Davidson has the resources to avoid Dummett's incompatibility claims that this section will provide an understanding of how the concepts of truth and meaning are given body and content on his account. The section will start by first drawing the relevant distinction I intend to use to clarify Davidson's position regarding the concept of truth, before bringing it into relation with Davidson's work more directly.

In chapter 2, I noted that McDowell cites a truistic connection between truth and assertoric content that he thinks is the only hygienic conception of truth there is (McDowell, 1987, p. 89). This conception of truth is one that is expressed in the "identity conception" of truth which states that if one asserts that p , then what one asserts is true if p , false if $\sim p$. Such a conception of truth forms the basis for his interest in meaning-theories which specify what are in fact the truth-conditions of sentences of a language as a way of specifying their

content. For if s is a sentence that can be used to assert that p , and p is necessary and sufficient for the truth of that assertion, then this ensures that the contents of assertions cannot but be specifications of the truth-conditions for sentences used to make those assertions. However, as 3.4 discussed, this way of elucidating the concept of truth that would figure centrally with a truth-conditional conception of meaning renders a meaning-theory as only ever being modest. It is essential to understanding how McDowell's truistic connection captures the content of the concept of truth that we are able to understand what sentences of the language can be used to assert. The notion of a particular sentence meaning what it does is, then, taken as given in this elucidation of the concept of truth. This, combined with maintaining a truth-conditional conception of meaning, means that a meaning-theory that embodies such conceptions of truth and meaning can only provide trivial explanations about in virtue of what particular items mean what they do when that conception of truth takes a central role within the theory. This results from the fact that an account of this form would help itself to a presupposed understanding of a competence of the target language in elucidating its conceptions of truth and meaning.

The connection that McDowell cites between truth and assertoric content is, indeed, a truism and so its correctness cannot be questioned. However, the concept of truth can be encountered in two different ways in the course of constructing a meaning-theory for a language; one "inside" the language under study and one understood as from "outside" it. The first way we may encounter the concept of truth is its expressibility within the language under study, and here we can agree with McDowell that the significance of this notion is fully fixed precisely by the connection to assertoric content that he cites (McDowell, 1981, p. 319). Indeed the truism provides an explanation of the word "true" for those who already have a competence of the target language. We could perfectly well imagine a language which had no word translatable as "true", but, armed with McDowell's thoughts concerning truth, we could introduce such a word to the language. As Dummett says about minimalist and redundancy theories of truth proper, if someone already understood the language, and it was then extended to include the word "true" in this manner, they would have the resources to understand the newly expanded language (Dummett, 1976, p. 42). Introducing a word for truth in this manner might now allow speakers to make certain generalisations that they could not before, where "true" is not eliminable, such as "what Dan just said is

true” and “everything he said was true”. When understood as a claim concerning the point of having a word for truth within a language, the identity conception of truth that McDowell wishes to advance would endorse Horwich’s claim that it is from such a role that the truth predicate gets its value and explains its presence within a language (Hornsby, 1997, p. 21):

I am not suggesting, of course, that the truth predicate was introduced deliberately to perform this useful function. But I am supposing that its usefulness, as just described, is what explains its presence. For if it were not valuable at all, it would presumably fall out of use; and as for alternative functions that it might have, there simply aren’t any plausible candidates (Horwich, 1998, p. 33).

In this sense, the identity conception can be seen as agreeing with the idea that the minimalist theorists “Schema E” (it is true that p if and only if p) is taken to encapsulate, “that in introducing a word for truth into a language not containing such a word, one introduces nothing which is new (so to speak)” (Hornsby, 1997, p. 20). As such, the identity conception can be seen as capturing the intuition that finds its expression in redundancy and minimalist theories of truth proper (McDowell, 1987, p. 90). Where the minimalist and redundancy theorists go wrong, however, is in stepping beyond a description of the truth predicates occurrence within a language to making pronouncements about the general concept of truth. For Horwich claims that:

...in order for the truth predicate to fulfil its function we must acknowledge that (MT) The proposition *that quarks really exist* is true if and only if quarks really exist, the proposition that *lying is bad* is true if and only if lying is bad,... and so, *but nothing more about truth need be assumed*. The entire conceptual and theoretical role of truth may be explained on this basis. This confirms our suspicion that the traditional attempt to discern the essence of truth – to analyse that special quality which all truths supposedly have in common – is just a pseudo-problem based on syntactic overgeneralization. Unlike most other properties, *being true* is unsusceptible to conceptual or scientific analysis. No wonder that its “underlying nature” has so stubbornly resisted philosophical elaboration; for there is simply no such thing (Horwich, 1998, p. 5).

The truth predicates occurrence within a language is explained by the fact that it fulfils a useful function, and this function is claimed to be captured by uncontroversial instances of Schema E. Since nothing more about the general notion of truth has to be assumed in order to capture this function, Horwich concludes from this that it should lead us to see that the

concept of truths *entire* conceptual and theoretical role is exhaustively captured in uncontroversial instances of Schema E.

This conclusion should be resisted, however, and this is seen by the fact that we would have to encounter the concept of truth in a second way by following the Davidsonian methodology. This second way would be in the very process of constructing a meaning-theory in the first place. One way it would be centrally important in this respect is when we come to understand the practice of assertion, or what it is that we “do” when we use a sentence to make an assertion, in Dummett’s words (Dummett, 1967, p. 106). Here the concept of truth, and its connection with assertion, seems ineliminable in any understanding of what it is to make an assertion. For when a speaker makes an assertion, they are doing more than expressing the thought that the assertion concerns; they are not simply predicating whiteness of snow, say, in asserting that snow is white. Given a distinction between the force of an utterance and its content, predicating whiteness of snow would be what is common to asking whether snow is white, wishing snow is white, supposing that snow is white, commanding that snow is white, etc. What marks out an assertion that snow is white from the rest of these speech acts is that a speaker is expressing their acceptance/acknowledgment of the thought *as-true*. They are taking a particular stance towards the content of their speech act in making an assertion, which marks out their speech-act precisely as an assertion. We cannot say that they are simply accepting/acknowledging the thought that *p* outright, as there are many ways a thought could be accepted/acknowledged. For example it could be accepted as funny, as flattering, as outrageous, etc. Instead we need to use the concept of truth to characterise what it is that a speaker is accepting about the content of their speech act, and this role is not redundant and cannot be eliminated away for this reason.

The concept of truth is, then, bound up with that of assertion in a way that does not concern its expressibility within the language under study. As I said, we could perfectly well imagine a language that did not have a word for truth in it, but that would not mean that the concept of truth would have no role to play in theorising about the language. Speakers of that language will still be able to make assertions even if they did not have a word for truth, and when we turn to understand this practice and distinguish it from others that involve differing speech-acts, we, the theorists, will need to use the concept of truth here. When we

do so, “true” will occur within the language we are doing our theorising in. We are using it to characterise a general practice that concerns the use of language and the nature of a specific, central speech act in that language by saying that to assert is to accept a thought as true. What this means, then, is that we are not saying, of some particular assertion, that it is true in using the concept of truth, which is what the identity conception of truth concerns itself with elucidating. Importantly, this reflective, explanatory role that the concept of truth takes can be construed without already assuming that we know what sentences of the language can be used to assert precisely because it does not concern its expressibility within the language under study. Rather it is used to identify a distinguishing feature of a particular act that can be understood and appreciated without assuming a competence of the target language.

Although Davidson does not discuss the identity conception of truth, there is much in his work that is congenial to it. He sympathises with minimalist theories of truth that do not attempt to pump more content into the concept of truth than there is, as traditional substantive accounts, like the classical correspondence and coherence theories, were liable to do (Davidson, 1996, p. 265). The attractions of minimalist and redundancy theories proper are entirely negative for Davidson; they avoid well marked dead ends and recognisable pitfalls (Davidson, 1996, p. 275). McDowell’s recommendation of the identity conception of truth is also one that is primarily negative. It is raised in a context in which we are warned against the inflationist theorising of the correspondence theory but also stronger brands of minimalism in which the concept of truth is not taken to be of central importance to philosophical reflection about the relation of thought and language to reality (McDowell, 2005a, p. 87). Davidson’s agrees that the concept of truth is highly important and interesting for precisely these reasons, which is why he rejects the positive proposals of minimalist theories of truth that step beyond explaining the expressibility of the concept of truth within a language to making pronouncements regarding its general character.

McDowell cites Aristotle’s dictum that to say of what is that it is, or what is not that it is not, is true, as being a more archaic formulation of the identity conception. In reference to our pre-theoretical conception of truth, Davidson also approvingly cites Tarski’s quotation of Aristotle’s dictum (Davidson, 1996, p. 265). Tarski makes reference to Aristotle’s pre-theoretical conception of truth in the course of finding an adequacy condition, in the form of

Convention T, to place on definitions of truth-predicates in formalised language to ensure that the predicates defined do indeed accord with how common sense conceives of truth. As we have seen, Davidson takes Tarski's work on truth as being highly important in the philosophy of language since the core of a Davidsonian meaning-theory for a particular language would be a truth theory for that language. Davidson thinks that Tarski's work sheds light on the general concept of truth as well, however; "What Tarski has done for us is show in detail how to describe the kind of pattern truth must make, whether in language or in thought (Davidson, 1990, p. 295). The kind of pattern that Davidson is referring to is the fact that Tarski has shown how the truth-conditions of sentences of the language depend upon the semantic properties of their parts and the way that they are put together, which will determine a pattern of truth perseverance amongst sentences. This connects with our pre-theoretical conception of truth; that the truth of an assertion depends upon what the words in the sentence used to make the assertion mean, and how things are in the world.

However Davidson does not think that Tarski has told us everything there is with regards to the concept of truth. In the first instance, this is because Tarski's truth-predicates are defined in terms of the notion of satisfaction, which in turn is defined by enumerating cases. This means that Tarski's truth-definitions do not, in themselves, show how to extend the truth-predicates defined to cover the introduction of new words to the language, or to cover entirely new languages.²⁷ Their inability to do this means that they do not tell us what the various truth-predicates defined have in common, and what is common amongst the truth-predicates must be part of the content of the concept of truth. Importantly, Davidson does not think it is satisfactory to point to Convention T at this juncture either. Although Convention T is indeed a more formalised version of Aristotle's dictum and McDowell's identity conception, and so expresses a conception of truth that is platitudinous, Davidson tells us that "aside from our grasp of the concept of translation, Convention T gives us no idea how to tell in general when one Tarski's truth predicates applies to a particular

²⁷ Davidson says that his mistake in "Truth and Meaning" was to think that a Tarski truth definition could tell us everything we need to know about truth and use it as the core of a meaning-theory (Davidson, 1990, p. 286, n. 20). However it is difficult, when reading that work, to actually locate that error. It might, however, find its expression in his comment that to "know the semantic conceptions of truth for a language is to know what it is for a sentence – any sentence – to be true, and this amounts, in one good sense we can give to the phrase, to understanding the language" (Davidson, 1967, p. 24).

language. He does not define the concept of translation" (Davidson, 1990, p. 296). This is the same point that I made above when considering McDowell's conception of truth and the modesty of his position. It is essential in understanding how the identity conception of truth captures the content of the concept of truth that we are able to understand what sentences of the language can be used to assert. It therefore presupposes a competence of the target language when explicating its truistic conception. Similarly, Convention T relies upon the notion of translation in showing us that Tarski's truth-definitions do indeed accord with how common sense conceives of truth. It therefore also presupposes an understanding of the meaning of the sentences in the language to which the truth-predicate is defined.

Davidson's unwillingness to cite Convention T as characterising an appropriate conception of truth looks to result from a realisation that this would provide a minimalist conception of the concept of truth that would take the meanings of the target languages sentences as given. Endorsing a truth-conditional conception of meaning and taking this minimalist conception of truth as centrally important would then result in a position which is unsatisfyingly modest. Although Davidson agrees that truth and meaning can only be explained together, his methodology is to illuminate those concepts by using the concept of truth, through the attitude of holding-true, to provide non-trivial explanations about in virtue of what particular items of a language mean what they do. It is by using the concept in such a project that its content is given, and this provides more body to both concepts than McDowell offers. For McDowell's justification regarding his interest in truth-conditions by citing the identity conception of truth captures what is right about the idea that the truth-predicate functions as a device of disquotation, he tell us. When yielding his theorems in the core/shell of his modest meaning-theory, this feature of the truth-predicate is all that is needed. However, Davidson's account does something more than providing modest theorems, by achieving non-triviality. This project cannot be achieved by using the disquotational feature of the concept of truth, with Davidson needing to rely on features of the concept of truth that are not touched by disquotation. Instead he uses the concept of truth, through the attitude of holding-true, in a way that does not concern its expressibility within the language to provide a statement of the evidence upon which the correctness of the meaning-theory is tested against:

A theory of truth for a language in use is an empirical theory: it attempts to specify, for speakers of the language, the conditions under which sentences of their language are true. Of course if "is true" is a truth predicate, and "if and only if" expresses biconditionality, a sentence of the form "'Snow is white' is true if and only if snow is white" can't be false, whatever "Snow is white" may mean, on the (empirical) assumption that the semantics of the mentioned sentence coincide with the semantics of that sentence as used. But once the question is raised whether the theory, as stated in an interpreter's language, is true of the language of a second person, the empirical and non-trivial character of the theory becomes obvious. What should count as confirming that such a theory is true? To ask this question is to ask a question about the concept of truth that disquotation cannot answer (Davidson, 2005, p. 70).

It is by using the notion of holding-true, then, in an account that provides non-trivial answers to questions regarding the meanings of sentences that Dummett's incompatibility claims are avoided. The explanatory strategy that Davidson should be seen as taking is as follows. Once we have an understanding of what it is to assert that p in the language under study, we can introduce a word for truth in that language at the end of our story by relying on McDowell's thoughts given in the identity conception of truth. However, in order to answer the question as to what it is that sentences of the language can be used to assert informatively in the first place, we have to use the notion of truth through the attitude of holding-true. It is by using the concept in this manner that we explicate the concept and provide it with content in the same manner as the rest of the central concepts are given content. That is, by showing how the central concepts must hang together for intelligibility of others to be possible at all in the process of radical interpretation which does not assume in advance an understanding of the target or of the psychological states of speakers.

Reflecting on the role of truth within Davidson's account also allows us to see how he can claim that though truth is an explanatory concept, it is not the one central primitive. For Davidson, to assert is manifest the attitude of holding-true. The notion of holding-true is, then, the interiorisation of the act of assertion. What this means is that just as the concept of assertion is connected with that of truth in a way that does not concern its expressibility within a language, Davidson expresses the same picture in saying that the concept of truth is connected with that of belief through the attitude of holding-true. Talking about the attitude of holding-true is an interchangeable way of expressing the same ideas regarding truths connection with assertion. By assuming the notion of holding-true, then, what Davidson is

also presupposing are the concepts of belief, assertion and desire as well. This is how he achieves the balancing act of not reconstructing the concept of meaning in terms of truth alone, whilst also not holding a position “which claims no particular conceptual illumination from the notion of truth as such” (McDowell, 1980, p. 43). What is more accurately described as fundamental is all these semantic and intentional concepts. Indeed, when referring to conceptions of meaning that attempt to explain that concept in terms of some other notion aside from truth (assertability or use, which are not, in turn, understood in terms of the concept of truth), Davidson tells us that:

My hopes lie in the opposite direction: I think the sort of assertion that is linked to understanding already incorporates the concept of truth: we are *justified* in asserting a sentence in the required sense only if we believe the sentence we use to make the assertion is true; and what ultimately ties language to the world is that the conditions that typically cause us to hold sentences true *constitute* the truth conditions, and hence the meanings, of our sentences (Davidson, 1996, p. 275).

6.5. Conclusion

What this chapter has argued is that Davidson’s work should be read as lying in a conceptual space between Dummett and McDowell on the “full-bloodedness-modesty” spectrum. This has been the positive proposal of my thesis, and has been achieved by making the negative claim that neither Dummett nor McDowell are able to establish their strong contentions regarding the form that a meaning-theory should take. I have shown the need for something less than their extremes, and I have indicated that the position they jointly dictate is the position that we should read Davidson as occupying.

Dummett’s ambition is to provide as much illumination to the central concepts as possible by describing linguistic practice at the ground level with a normative, but non-semantic, notion of use. In wanting to do so, however, the resulting picture will be one that is not sufficiently distant enough from Wittgenstein’s builders. Here we do have a practice that is normative, in that the building assistant ought to bring a slab whenever he hears the appropriate call from the foreman, and as the assistant carries out this action he responds appropriately with some form of basic understanding in that he is aware that his behaviour “fits” the call he has heard. The builders are therefore a level above the conditioned behaviour of the animals in the Skinner box experiments, as such animals have no awareness in what they are doing or the appropriateness of their behaviour. In order to

accurately describe what we find with the builders we would have to use normative vocabulary and not just describe the situation in behaviouristic, causal terms. The practice of the builders is not one, however, in which the central concepts that are bound up with rationality are in view. Dummett wishes to emphasise the fact that competency in a language is not “merely” a practical ability to speak it but involves knowledge or understanding in that speakers are aware of the appropriateness of their behaviour. It is because Dummett’s meaning-theory has an ineliminable notion of understanding or knowledge within it that he thinks it makes room for bringing to bear concepts concerned with rationality such as those of intentions, purposes, motives, etc. onto speakers.

However, if the vocabulary that he wishes to use to describe the practice of language is one that concerns social norms but which is not semantical, and this vocabulary is on a conceptual level with one that could be used to describe the activity that the builders are engaged in where the central concepts that are bound up with rationality are not in view, but where responding with awareness or understanding is, then why should we be certain that the resultant account will be one that adequately captures the concepts we are interested in and makes the practice out as being one that is inherently rational? Instead it looks as though language is being made out, not as being more complex in the sense that it is a totally different practice to the one that the builders are engaged in, but rather one that is more complex in the sense that it comprises a vast number of builder type language-games. That is, that language is just another rule-governed human activity amongst many others we have, just like chess, rather than being something totally different. The thought now is that, if rationality and the central concepts are not present in the builder language-game, then simply adding more language-games of this type will not magic such things into the picture.

The fact that we should not follow Dummett in wanting a reductionist account of the central concepts does not mean that we should relinquish the desire to provide non-trivial, substantive explanations regarding what it is for particular items of a language to have the meanings they do. The two tasks are distinct, and can be separated. For, *prima facie*, when we set out to provide a philosophical account of the concept of meaning so as to reveal the relations between sound and, as it were, significance, we should be aiming to afford as much illumination as possible. That there is some sort of initial philosophical puzzlement regarding what it is for the sounds we utter to mean what they do is clear, and if we could

provide non-trivial explanations for particular items of the language then we will be afforded with a more substantial explanation regarding the general concept of meaning, and the other central notions that concern the philosophy of language, by following Davidson's methodology of reflecting on the form of a meaning-theory that encompassed such explanations. As Davidson says, the concepts we use in the course of constructing a meaning-theory "must not beg the question; they should be sufficiently remote from what the theory ultimately produces. This final condition is no more than we ask of any revealing analysis, but it is difficult, at least in this case, to satisfy it" (Davidson, 1990, p. 315).

Dummett's hope that we are afforded with the maximum amount of illumination by reducing the central concepts is indeed a condition that cannot be sustained in this respect, but that does not mean that we cannot say something more substantive about the central concepts than McDowell is willing to contemplate. The burden looks to be with McDowell at this point to show why such non-trivial explanations are not just difficult to provide but cannot, as a matter of principle, be given, and so should not be sought after at all (cf. Heck, 2007, p. 534).

McDowell does indeed attempt to quieten the desire to take such questions seriously by assembling a reminder that the correctness of a homophonic theory is obvious. It is by explaining the correctness of the core of a meaning-theory in terms of facts about use that we provide answers about in virtue of what particular items of the language mean what they do. McDowell wants to draw our attention to the fact that since the correctness of the core of a homophonic theory is obvious, we should not be taking questions concerning its correctness seriously and so we should not be providing substantial explanations about what the meanings of particular items consist in terms of an entirely distinct shell. Instead the core and shell are seen as collapsing, and we can simply read off trivial explanations regarding facts about particular items by treating a Tarskian truth theory for a particular language as if it were a meaning-theory for it and by assuming that we have a competence of the target language. Assembling such reminders is the negative aspect of McDowell's quietist reading of the Davidsonian methodology.

His positive proposal involves a replacement of substantive philosophical explanations with an enterprise of description, as what is needed for McDowell is a mapping of the interrelations between the central concepts that can, in this respect, be taken

as already being perfectly well understood. Heterophonic theories are important in this respect, as considering what would be needed to fill in the condition that a meaning-theory has to make best rational sense of speakers of a previously unknown language involves describing what is involved in finding peoples actions, linguistic or not, intelligible as manifestations of rationality. It is by locating a rich battery of concepts that would have to be brought to bear in the process of coming to understand a previously unknown language that our insight is improved concerning such central concepts. The richer the concepts used, the more improved the insight. In turn, this reading of the Davidsonian project looks to reject Dummett's assumption that a meaning-theory will have one central notion on which the explanatory burden falls and in terms of which linguistic practice can be described. McDowell claims "no particular conceptual illumination from the notion of truth as such" (McDowell, 1980, p. 43), and instead takes the notion of content for granted. Any perplexity that might be felt regarding this notion is relieved by following the type of conceptual geography he advocates.

McDowell is right in saying that the correctness of a homophonic theory is obvious but only in the sense in which it is obvious to someone who is already competent in the language in question. Only under that assumption can McDowell's argument proceed to claim that non-trivial explanations should not be sought after. That assumption looks to be illegitimate, though, in the course of establishing modesty and undermining the desire to answer questions about what it is for items to mean what they do non-trivially. It simply amounts to a flat refusal to answer precisely those sorts of questions non-trivially, rather than providing independent grounds for why we should not be attempting to answer them non-trivially in the first place. McDowell has given us little to go on here for thinking that his insistence on relying on an understanding of the object language is mandatory aside from an implicit nod towards a "how else" argument regarding what notion of use would be viable other than one which concerns the very thoughts that sentences of the language can be used to assert.

Dummett's commitment to full-bloodedness is the reason he claims there is an incompatibility between a minimalist conception of truth and a truth-conditional meaning-theory. The truistic, minimalistic thought that McDowell cites regarding truth is that if one asserts that p , then what one asserts is true if p , false if $\sim p$, and this thought is used to justify

his interest in truth-conditions. For this connection between truth and assertoric content guarantees, as a platitude, that to specify what would be asserted in an assertoric use of a sentence apt for such use is to specify a condition under which the sentence used would be true. An explication of the concept of truth along these lines is one that helps itself to the “that *p*” construction, and so one that simply helps itself to a competence of the object language by taking it as known what sentences of the language can be used to assert. If we are aiming to give non-trivial explanations regarding what it is for particular items of the language to have the meanings they do, then we cannot start out by characterising truth in this manner on the truth-conditional conception, even if the truistic thought that McDowell cites is not taken as exhausting truth’s content.

Although Davidson does offer a full-blooded account by aiming to provide non-trivial answers to the constitutive questions about the meanings and competency of particular items, he does not offer a “maximally” full-blooded account. For Davidson, unlike Dummett, has no interest in wanting to reduce the central concepts to those of a lower conceptual level. I have provided a reading of Davidson which gives his notion of use, construed in terms of the attitude of holding-true, centre stage. In the first instance, this was to argue that McDowell is mistaken in taking Davidson to be an ally in his defence of modesty. McDowell sees Davidson’s holism as consisting in his insistence that the central concepts that concern the philosophy of language are so interconnected that “it is bootless to hope to understand one independently of understanding the others” (Davidson, 1990, p. 316). Although Davidson does indeed think this, he goes on to say that what is needed “is an approach that yields an interpretation of a speaker’s words at the same time that it provides a basis for attributing beliefs and desires to the speaker. Such an approach aims to provide a basis for, rather than assume, the individuation of propositional attitudes” (Davidson, 1990, p. 316).

Davidson’s holism should be seen as also relating to how a meaning-theory is tested for its correctness. The correctness of the theorems of a meaning-theory are to be judged by the acceptability of the entire theory, which is itself assessed against the total number of hold-true attitudes that the theory relies on to assign references and extensions to the expressions of the language. The criterion that one particular theorem is judged as being correct is exactly the same as the criterion by which any other theorem is judged as being

correct – against the total number of hold-true attitudes of speakers. It is by having a notion of use that does not trivialise the slogan that meaning is determined by use and testing the correctness of a meaning-theory holistically that Davidson achieves full-bloodedness.

Davidson's notion of use was also thought of as providing the resources to avoid Dummett's claim of an incompatibility between a truth-conditional conception of meaning and a minimalist conception of truth. For Davidson looks to accept many of the assumptions of Dummett's argument. He endorses both the truth-conditional approach, full-bloodedness, that truth and meaning should be explained together and has sympathies for a minimalist conception of truth. However Davidson withholds himself from characterising the concept of truth that would play a central role in his theory in minimalist terms. Instead the concept is characterised "as from outside" the language through the attitude of holding-true. This is a conception of truth that is not characterised in terms of what sentences of the language can be used to assert, as it can be identified prior to any understanding of the language. Instead it is by using the concept to provide an understanding of a target language in the first place that its content is given. Once an understanding of that language has been provided, we are then free to give truth a word within that language by citing the identity conception of truth that McDowell wishes to endorse.

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