

The Metaphysics of Meaning

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A Bradford Book
The MIT Press
Cambridge, Massachusetts
London, England

1990

Introduction

More than any other philosopher of the century, Wittgenstein was responsible for its celebrated linguistic turn. In his hands the linguistic turn became a powerful new form of critical philosophy which sought to eliminate metaphysics rather than reconstruct it. Unlike Kant's reformist critical philosophy, which aimed as much to provide a solid foundation for large parts of traditional metaphysics as to expose improperly formulated metaphysical questions, Wittgenstein's radical critical philosophy aimed at exposing all metaphysical questions as improperly formulated. Kant is like the liberal who is trying to improve the political system from within; Wittgenstein is like the revolutionary who is trying to bring it down.

Frege provided many of the essential ideas for the linguistic turn, particularly in its earliest phases. He introduced—or provided influential formulations of—such ideas as that certain philosophical problems are pseudo-problems arising from imperfections of natural language, that such problems can be solved by constructing an ideal language to replace natural language for the purpose of precise reasoning, and that the construction of the ideal language can be based on technical notions from within logic. Frege supplied something of a blueprint for an ideal language in his *Begriffsschrift*, as well as many of its technical notions, including that of a logical function, quantifiers, the functional calculus, the sense/reference distinction, and the grammatical form/logical form distinction.

But at heart Frege was a traditional philosopher, highly sympathetic to Kant's metaphysics and a staunch Platonist in the philosophy of logic and mathematics. Frege would have been the last person to use his ideas to launch a critique of metaphysics designed to refute its claim to provide genuine knowledge of the most abstract aspects of reality. Like Leibniz before him, Frege saw his logico-linguistic ideas as in the service of the metaphysical enterprise, as helping it to make good on some of its traditional claims.

The early Wittgenstein saw Frege's ideas in a quite different light. Wittgenstein saw Frege's work, together with the work of Whitehead and Russell, as the logico-linguistic basis for a throughgoing critique that would expose the pretensions of metaphysical philosophy to a knowledge of reality not obtainable from the study of nature.¹ This critique of metaphysics would use such logico-linguistic ideas to show that metaphysical language as a whole is without meaning. Nothing in his early philosophy better sums up all the essential elements in this critique—its linguistic form, its implacable hostility to metaphysics, and its underlying naturalistic perspective—than Wittgenstein's penultimate comment on one of the *Tractatus's* principal theses: "The right method of philosophy would be this: To say nothing except what can be said, i.e., the propositions of natural science, i.e., something that has nothing to do with philosophy: and then always, when someone else wished to say something metaphysical, to demonstrate to him that he had given no meaning to certain signs in his propositions."²

This quotation comments on the thesis that the general form of a proposition is a truth function of elementary propositions. This thesis derives from the theory of propositional structure in Frege's *Begriffsschrift* and Whitehead and Russell's *Principia Mathematica*.³ That theory provided Wittgenstein with a basis for working out "the right method of philosophy," that is, for charting the limits of meaningful language and showing that metaphysical sentences are literally nonsense because they go beyond those limits. Applying Frege's and Russell's conception of the conditions for factual assertion to sentences of natural language, Wittgenstein sought in the *Tractatus* to specify the principles in accord with which factual sentences of natural science and everyday life receive a meaning while metaphysical sentences do not. Applying Frege's grammatical form/logical form distinction, he tried to explain how, in virtue of resembling factual sentences in overt grammatical form, metaphysical sentences can mislead us into thinking that they too inform us about how things are. But metaphysical sentences only give the appearance of making assertions; they do not actually do so, because they do not picture reality. Once we appreciate how metaphysical sentences differ from factual sentences with respect to logical form, we will recognize the boundary within which we can speak sensibly, beyond which we must remain silent.

The transition from the *Tractatus* with its "right method of philosophy" to the *Philosophical Investigations* with its denial of a single right method and its insistence on many methods ("like different therapies") was brought about by profound changes in Wittgenstein's

thinking, many of them rejections of Fregean elements in his early philosophy.⁴ Wittgenstein abandoned Frege's theory of meaning with senses as objective presentations of reality and its truth-functional conception of the form of propositions, Frege's idea of logical form as something hidden beneath the grammatical surface of sentences, together with its associated idea of analysis as revealing underlying logical form, and, finally, Frege's conception of a logically perfect language as a calculus with fixed rules, embodying the logician's ideal of complete precision.

But two of the principal ideas of Wittgenstein's early philosophy survive to become principal ideas of his late philosophy. One is the leading idea of the early critical philosophy, the thesis that metaphysical sentences are nonsense because they transcend the limits of language. As a consequence of Wittgenstein's abandoning of the *Tractatus*, which provided the framework within which it has been originally formulated, the thesis had to be drastically reformulated. But, reformulated in the newly created framework, it becomes the leading idea of the late critical philosophy. The key notions of the thesis: 'meaning', 'limits of language', and 'transcend', are fleshed out in a very different way. Languages are conceived of as gamelike activities in which participants use signs in accordance with rules, analogous to rules of chess and other social practices, themselves part of more general "forms of life." Meaning, on this approach, is not something to be sought beneath the surface grammar of signs—in, as it were, the logical microstructure of sentences—but is out in the open, in the public use of signs. Techniques of applying words in everyday affairs, based on a mastery of their use in the community, replace the formal rules of a Fregean calculus as the determiners of meaning. Everyday language, contrary to Frege, is perfectly all right as it is (PI: 120–124). Accordingly, its everyday functioning sets the limits of language. Transcending the limits is now a matter of departing from ordinary use in ways that outstrip our practices and thereby go beyond the possibilities for meaningful application contained in the rules (PI: 116–119). Thus, in spite of all the differences between the *Philosophical Investigations* and the *Tractatus*, the sentences of metaphysics are still simply "one or another piece of plain nonsense," and the work of philosophy is still to prevent "bumps that the understanding has got by running its head up against the limits of language" (PI: 119).

The other principal idea to survive from Wittgenstein's early philosophy is the idea that "what can be said" are "the propositions of natural science," although this idea, too, undergoes reformulation, specifically by using the notion of natural science in conjunction with the broader notion of natural history and by adding the therapeutic

device of imagining possible natural histories. Wittgenstein writes: "What we are supplying are really remarks on the natural history of human beings; we are not contributing curiosities however, but observations which no one has doubted, but which have escaped remark only because they are always before our eyes." (PI: 415) This idea that significant expression concerns the natural world is, of course, connected with the idea that metaphysical sentences are nonsense. The former idea makes it possible to identify metaphysical claims about a reality beyond the natural world, e.g., about abstract objects and essences, as what cannot be said. Thus, the *Tractatus's* equation of the contrast between sense and nonsense with the contrast between the natural and the transcendent remains in the *Philosophical Investigations*. Wittgenstein's point is still that there are no non-natural, metaphysical facts. He writes:

Why shouldn't I apply words in ways that conflict with their original usage? Doesn't Freud, for example, do this when he calls even an anxiety dream a wish-fulfilment dream? Where is the difference? In a scientific perspective a new use is justified by a theory. And if this theory is false, the new extended use has to be given up. But in philosophy the extended use does not rest on true or false beliefs about natural processes. No fact justifies it. None can give it any support. (C&V: p. 44e)

The *Tractatus's* use of natural science and the *Philosophical Investigations's* use of natural history are supplemented in the context of the latter book's therapeutic orientation. In part II, section xii, Wittgenstein explains why his philosophical investigations are not simply natural science or natural history. If the focus of the investigations were exclusively on the "causes of the formation of concepts," they would be, but the focus is also on the invention of "fictitious natural history for our purposes" (PI: xii). The purposes are therapeutic, namely, to show people in the grip of a metaphysical concept of how things must be that "certain very general facts of nature" might be different and, thereby, to show them that other concepts of how those things are are "intelligible" (PI: xii). This explanation in no way undercuts the naturalistic outlook common to the *Tractatus* and the *Philosophical Investigations*.

From the perspective of the *Philosophical Investigations*, the *Tractatus* stands accused of many of the sins of which it accuses metaphysics. The old critical philosophy is seen as deeply incoherent because the *Tractatus* expresses the claim that metaphysics sins against language *metaphysically*, and, consequently, it is subject to its own charge of being nonsense. The *Tractatus* goes beyond the limits of language (in

the new sense) because it employs Frege's and Russell's theoretical conception of meaning and language, and much of the metaphysics that goes with it. The *Tractatus* assumes that the possibilities of meaning lie hidden in the essence of language, in the general form of its propositions. Propositions are senses, logical bodies of sentences lying beneath and disguised by their grammatical clothing. Given that it is thus necessary to penetrate beneath words to the meanings they disguise, the *Tractatus* is deeply committed to a logical theory that pictures the hidden meanings and unifies the elements of the picture into a conception of the general form of language. Such a theory, not being a piece of natural science, must be a piece of metaphysics.

The role of logical theory in philosophy is thus seen, in some significant respects, as like that of theory in science: it takes us to places that observation cannot reach and provides us with the understanding essential to solving—or, in this case, dissolving—problems. On the new critical philosophy, however, theories are no longer an essential part of the solution; they are rather an essential part of the problem. Philosophical theories, especially those dealing with the essence of language, such as Frege's and Russell's, put us in the grip of a picture of how things must be: "But *this* is how it is —' I say to myself over and over again. I feel as though, if only I could fix my gaze absolutely sharply on this fact, get it in focus, I must grasp the essence of the matter." (PI: 113) We are entrapped in philosophical problems because the pictures that our theories present keep us from seeing how things actually are: "One thinks that one is tracing the outline of the thing's nature over and over again, and one is merely tracing round the frame through which we look at it." (PI: 114)

The first part of *Philosophical Investigations* is a sustained critique of philosophical theories of meaning. It is designed to expose the role of theories in philosophical perplexities about language and to replace the picture they present of meanings as objects with a conception of meaning in terms of use (PI: 120). This critique is the means by which Wittgenstein replaces the traditional view of philosophy as a search for abstract essences with his new view of philosophy as dissolving philosophical problems by showing how they arise as the result of misuses which get us lost in the maze of our own rules (PI: 123). As Wittgenstein puts it at one place, "The fundamental fact here is that we lay down rules, a technique, for a game, and that then when we follow the rules, things do not turn out as we had assumed. That we are therefore as it were entangled in our own rules." (PI: 125) The crux of the new critical philosophy is that proper methods of philosophy enable us to see such entanglements clearly enough to

extricate ourselves from them: "Philosophy simply puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything.—Since everything lies open to view there is nothing to explain. For what is hidden, for example, is of no interest to us." (PI: 126) The new critical philosophy thus leaves no room for metaphysics. Philosophical method is entirely therapeutic (PI: 133). The critical philosophy of the *Tractatus* had left room for metaphysics in its various Fregean and Russellian doctrines about propositions, logic, and language. Such philosophical doctrines themselves go beyond the propositions of natural science and natural history, and, for this reason, are, at bottom, paradoxical. The late philosophy thus achieves a consistent formulation of Wittgenstein's critical thesis that the sentences of metaphysics, which assert nothing about the natural realm, have no meaning.

Wittgenstein's new critical philosophy expresses the most radical challenge to metaphysics in the history of Western philosophy. It calls into question the basic conception of philosophy in the Western tradition from Socrates to Frege, Russell, Moore, and Husserl. On this challenge, philosophers are mistaken to think they can grasp essences, or understand the most abstract aspects of reality, or discover the general foundations of the sciences, or provide a metaphysical explanation of how we can have the knowledge we suppose ourselves to have. If Wittgenstein is correct, metaphysics must disappear completely. Compared to this critical challenge, Kant's critical philosophy, which sought merely to restrict metaphysics to matters within its reach, is simply business as usual.

2

Wittgenstein's critique of theories of meaning plays the same pivotal role in his later philosophy that Descartes's proof of the *Sum* played in his new epistemological foundations.⁵ If successful, Wittgenstein's critique would provide a fixed point that enables him to move the philosophical world away from its traditional concern with trying to answer metaphysical questions to a therapeutic concern with trying to cure us of asking them. Instead of seeking to discover the most abstract aspects of reality in an attempt to solve philosophical problems, philosophers would seek "complete clarity" in an attempt to make "philosophical problems . . . completely disappear" (PI: 133). For Descartes to be successful in laying his new epistemological foundations, he had to show how to eliminate *all* doubts about his own existence. For Wittgenstein to be successful in his radical critical pur-

pose, he has to show how to eliminate *all* theories of meaning on which metaphysical questions are meaningful.

The initial question I shall examine in this book is: Does Wittgenstein succeed? Do his arguments in the *Philosophical Investigations* sweep the boards clear of every theory of meaning that gives the traditional conception of philosophy a semantic foothold? This is the primary question about Wittgenstein's late philosophy. The reason is clear: Wittgenstein's arguments against theories of meaning in the first part of *Philosophical Investigations* pave the way for everything he says about philosophy, mind, logic, and mathematics in later parts of the book and in other places like *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*. His doctrines about philosophy, mind, logic, and mathematics are largely applications of the account of meaning with which he replaces theories of meaning.

Yet, despite all the attention paid to his late philosophy, so far there has been no sustained, systematic examination of Wittgenstein's arguments against theories of meaning which, on the one hand, interprets them carefully and responsibly, and on the other, judges them by a sufficiently high standard of evaluation.⁶ By this I mean that, just as Descartes's arguments had to overcome *every* doubt about his existence, so Wittgenstein's have to refute *every* theory of meaning that could block his challenge to traditional philosophy. Chapters 2 and 3 of this book and, in a certain sense, chapter 4, examine Wittgenstein's critique of theoretical conceptions of meaning using this standard. I have based this examination on a careful reading of the text and have tried to be informed by the best contemporary scholarship and to put the question of adequate interpretation first. Still, my examination proceeds from a commitment to a theory of meaning and a conception of philosophy diametrically opposed to Wittgenstein's. But, given the need to impose a sufficiently high standard of evaluation, this is an advantage. A partisan examination is uniquely suited to subjecting Wittgenstein's arguments to the severest test. As noted above, Wittgenstein's own philosophical aims require us to judge his arguments by whether they refute *all* theories of meaning. In this respect, the theory of meaning to which I am committed is ideally suited for the job of evaluation. First, the theory defines the limits of language in a way that allows metaphysical sentences to be meaningful; hence, it provides semantic grounds for metaphysics. Second, the theory differs, in important ways, from the theories Wittgenstein explicitly considered when he fashioned his critique of theories of meaning; hence, it optimizes the chances of revealing any limitation in the scope of his arguments.

Chapter 2 argues that there are such limitations. They have not come to light before because Wittgenstein's arguments work so well against the theories for which Wittgenstein designed them. But Wittgenstein's way of structuring his overall critique of theories of meaning mistakenly supposes that the range of the theories encompassed in the critique includes all those which must, considering his ultimate philosophical aims, be included. Wittgenstein supposed, not without some justification, that Frege's theory, Russell's theory, his own *Tractatus* theory, and certain similar theories—"Begriffsschrift theories," as I shall call them—are fully representative of the theories of meaning that could be put forth to ground traditional metaphysics.⁷ On this supposition, he designed his arguments to undercut such theories at fundamental points. Since his arguments are, for the most part, effective in this, once this supposition is granted, the overall critique of theories of meaning is fully convincing. But there is no need to grant this supposition. Unlike other criticisms of Wittgenstein's arguments which try to defend Frege's theory or one of the other theories that Wittgenstein was explicitly addressing, my criticism calls this supposition into question and tries to prove it false by exhibiting a significant restriction of the range of theories for which the critique works.

My examination of Wittgenstein's critique reaches four principal conclusions:

- I. Wittgenstein's circumscription of theories of meaning is too narrow; hence, his critique of theories of meaning, though successful in the particular cases of the theories against which he directs his arguments in the *Philosophical Investigations*, is unsuccessful in the general case. The critique does not eliminate all theoretical conceptions of meaning. We can exhibit the type of theory against which it fails.
- II. Wittgenstein's paradox about rule following, which is an extension of his earlier arguments against semantic theorists, depends upon the general success of his critique of theories of meaning.
- III. The paradox about rule following can be shown not to arise in connection with the type of theory that was shown, in connection with conclusion I, to survive the earlier arguments. Hence, it can be resolved without adopting Wittgenstein's account of meaning and rule following.
- IV. Wittgenstein does not succeed in making his case against the traditional metaphysical view of philosophy and in favor of his own therapeutic view.

In formulating my argument for conclusion I, I have adopted the following strategy. I simultaneously pursue two lines of development, one starting at the beginning of *Philosophical Investigations* and running through each of its arguments against theories of meaning, the other starting with certain familiar and intuitively clear facts about the meaning of expressions in natural language and, step by step, working from them to a theory of meaning substantially different from Begriffsschrift theories. The idea behind the strategy is this. I focus on the points where these two lines of development intersect, that is, where one of Wittgenstein's arguments challenges a step in the construction of the theory. I try to show, at every such point, either that the argument at that point is inapplicable, say, because of some significant difference between the theory in question and Begriffsschrift theories, or that the argument is inadequate, say, because of some inherent difficulty. If the second line of development is not blocked at any point, the theory that emerges from it escapes Wittgenstein's critique.

My argument for conclusion II shows how Wittgenstein's arguments against theories of meaning prior to his statement of the paradox about rule following enter essentially into the paradox. The argument for conclusion III shows how the failure of the prior arguments blocks the paradox. It proceeds in two stages, the first directed to Wittgenstein's own discussion of the paradox and the second to Kripke's. In the first, I explain why the theory of meaning previously shown to survive Wittgenstein's critique resolves Wittgenstein's version of the paradox, and, in the second, I explain why that theory also resolves Kripke's version. By proceeding in this way, I steer clear of taking a position on the controversial (and, in the present context, tangential) issue of whether Kripke's Wittgenstein is Wittgenstein.⁸ In the course of both these stages, I hope to explain how the theory enables us to formulate an un-Wittgensteinian but nonetheless unparadoxical account of following a rule.

My argument for conclusion IV derives from my arguments for conclusions I–III. Wittgenstein's argument for his therapeutic view of philosophy involves three major steps: eliminating theoretical conceptions of meaning, putting his notion of use in their place, and, on the basis of that notion, showing that metaphysical sentences are a form of nonsense which arises when words are taken too far from their "original home" in everyday use (PI: 116). If Wittgenstein has not succeeded in putting his own notion of use in the place of theoretical conceptions of meaning because one of these conceptions survives his criticisms, then there is a theoretical basis on which

metaphysical sentences can be meaningful, and he has not made a case for his therapeutic view of philosophy.

3

In this and the next section, I want to indicate how this line of argument against Wittgenstein fits into the broader anti-naturalist line of argument in the book as a whole.

Wittgenstein's critique of theories of meaning has been and still is a significant force behind the revival of naturalism in Anglo-American philosophy during this century. America, of course, had its own naturalist philosophers. Although they contributed importantly to the tradition of naturalism in American philosophy, they did so more by way of entrenching and articulating the naturalist position than by way of providing major arguments that, like many of Wittgenstein's, significantly strengthen the contemporary naturalist's arsenal. Thus the arguments of American naturalists today, e.g., those of Quine, Goodman, and Putnam, are, in general, of a linguistic cast and, even in some matters of detail, are more like Wittgenstein's arguments than like those of Santayana, Woodbridge, Dewey, and Ernest Nagel. This, I think, is no accident. We can trace a line of development from Wittgenstein to philosophers like Schlick and Carnap and from them to philosophers like Quine and from them and Quine to philosophers like Goodman and Putnam.

As we have seen, the *Tractatus* took the naturalistic view that what can be said can be said in the propositions of natural science. Logical Positivists like Schlick were deeply influenced by both the naturalistic outlook and the logico-linguistic form of Wittgenstein's early thought. They opposed the claims of philosophers that there are things outside the causal nexus which are, as a consequence, beyond the reach of the empirical methods of natural science.⁹ Such Logical Positivists made use of Wittgenstein's ideas to argue against the claims of philosophers like Husserl that our logical, mathematical, and metaphysical knowledge is about non-natural objects and rests on a faculty of intuition. The aim of Logical Positivism can, in large part, be seen as a use of Frege's, Russell's, and Wittgenstein's contributions to logic and the philosophy of logic to modernize Hume's naturalism and empiricism. Hume's vague remarks about relations of ideas were to be explicated on the basis of such logical and philosophical contributions. His equally vague characterization of matters of fact was to be explicated on the basis of the criterion of empirical significance which the Positivists set themselves the task of framing with the new technical apparatus from logic.¹⁰

As later Logical Positivism became more Fregean in the hands of Frege's student Carnap, e.g., in becoming more accommodating to rationalist doctrines about abstract entities and necessary truth, Wittgenstein began to move away from the early position that had been so influential with the Vienna Circle and began to rid his thinking of all Fregean elements. In certain respects Wittgenstein's thinking was becoming more naturalistic in a sense akin to Hume,¹¹ but, more significantly, it was taking the very novel linguistic direction already described. Around the same time, Quine's thinking, initially much stimulated by the ideas of Carnap and other Logical Positivists, was becoming critical of certain of those ideas, especially of meanings as abstract entities and analytically necessary truth. Quine, too, began to move in the direction of Humean Empiricism and to rid his thinking of all Fregean elements. As early as 1951, Quine wrote:

Once the theory of meaning is sharply separated from the theory of reference, it is a short step to recognizing as the business of the theory of meaning simply the synonymy of expressions, the meaningfulness of expressions, and the analyticity or entailment of statements; meanings themselves, as obscure intermediate entities may well be abandoned. This is the step that Frege did not take . . . there is great difficulty in tying this well-knit group of concepts down to terms that we really understand. The theory of meaning, even with the elimination of the mysterious meant entities, strikes me as in a comparable state to theology.¹²

Wittgenstein and Quine faced much the same problem of removing the vestiges of non-naturalist metaphysics from earlier philosophical thinking. They solved it in different ways. Their different solutions provide the two different forms of naturalism in contemporary philosophy.

Logical Empiricists like Carnap allow non-natural semantic entities and logical knowledge irreducible to experience. They even allow the metaphysical principle that significant truths divide exhaustively into those expressing relations of ideas and those expressing matters of empirical fact, a principle which is itself semantically questionable in that it expresses neither a relation of ideas nor an empirical matter of fact. Frege, of course, insisted on semantic realism and synthetic *a priori* knowledge. Wittgenstein's rejection of non-natural entities and non-natural knowledge was accomplished by a reformulation of his radical critical philosophy in terms of a new conception of language and meaning which provides an uncompromising treatment of metaphysical sentences as nonsense.

Quine, unlike Wittgenstein, is not a critical philosopher. His rejec-

tion of such entities and such logical knowledge was accomplished by fashioning a naturalism on the model of the uncompromising empiricism of J. S. Mill, upgraded with the addition of a conception of the structure of knowledge which seemed to Quine to account better for the certainty of logic and mathematics. Quine treats philosophical investigation not as therapy but as naturalized epistemology, as natural science reflecting on itself. For Quine, a metaphysical principle is not *ipso facto* nonsense; it may be either a scientifically efficacious myth like the posit of physical objects or a scientifically impotent myth like that of Homer's gods.¹³

The tenor of Quine's naturalism is very well conveyed in this passage:

... we see all of science—physics, biology, economics, mathematics, logic, and the rest—as a single sprawling system, loosely connected in some portions but disconnected nowhere. Parts of it—logic, arithmetic, game theory, theoretical parts of physics—are farther from the observational or experimental edge than other parts. But the overall system, with all its parts, derives its aggregate empirical content from that edge; and the theoretical parts are good only as they contribute in their varying degrees of indirectness to the systematizing of that content.

In principle, therefore, I see no higher or more austere necessity than natural necessity; and in natural necessity, or our attributions of it, I see only Hume's regularities, culminating here and there in what passes for an explanatory trait or the promise of it.¹⁴

All knowledge is continuous with the paradigmatic natural sciences of physics, chemistry, and biology. The truths of logic and mathematics have a greater degree of certainty than those of other disciplines not because, as the non-naturalist thinks, they are about objects outside the causal nexus and known in a different way, but because logic and mathematics occupy a more central position in our overall system of beliefs. The revision of logical or mathematical statements disturbs the system as a whole far more than revision of statements in physics, chemistry, or biology, which lie closer to its observational or experimental edge. The greater support that the former statements give to and receive from other statements—in virtue of their central position in the system—accounts for their greater certainty.

In some respects, Quine's naturalistic message is similar to Wittgenstein's. Quine's target, too, is the intensionalist tradition in the philosophy of logic and language stemming from Frege. Quine's con-

cern with Carnap was largely a concern with certain of Frege's views which survive in Carnap's semantic doctrines. In particular, Quine's criticisms of Carnap were directed against Carnap's use of analyticity to fashion an empiricism that compromises with rationalism by conceding a place to *a priori* knowledge. Quine's motivation here, like Wittgenstein's in some places, is to avoid what he takes to be the philosophical confusion that results from countenancing "mysterious"—i.e., non-natural—entities, particularly Fregean senses and propositions.

Furthermore, Quine and Wittgenstein see language as the philosopher's basic concern, and, accordingly, both have an extremely broad view of the linguistic. Its sphere is sufficiently broad for language to encompass all the areas of philosophical concern. Quine and Wittgenstein both conceive of language as a social art. Quine is sympathetic to Wittgenstein's injunction that philosophers should confine themselves to what lies open to public view. To be sure, Quine does not share Wittgenstein's aversion to theories, but sees the injunction as stemming from the desirability of objective or behavioristic constraints on them. Both think there are no language-independent meanings. Quine takes meaningfulness as relative to a language system and its cultural matrix just as Wittgenstein takes it as relative to a system of linguistic techniques and practices and its supporting form of life. Finally, both are foes of absolute necessity. Quine, too, eschews any hope of truths "given once and for all; and independently of any future experience" (PI: 92). Even truths of logic and mathematics are open to revision in the light of future experience.¹⁵

But in other respects Quine differs sharply from the late Wittgenstein. Although Quine shares Wittgenstein's antipathy for Frege's philosophy, he does not share Wittgenstein's antipathy for Russell's. Russell's logical approach to philosophy can be seen as model for Quine's.¹⁶ Whereas the Wittgensteinian form of naturalism abandons the ideal of an logically perfect language with the character of a *Begriffsschrift*, the Quinean form remains faithful to that ideal. Furthermore, Quine shares Russell's scientific orientation to philosophy. Quine goes a step further in seeing the philosopher's constructive task as continuous with the scientist's. For Quine, philosophy differs from the special sciences "only in breadth of categories"; that is, the philosopher's questions are more general than the physicist's, but their answers are ultimately given on the same empirical basis.¹⁷ Thus, contrary to Wittgenstein (PI: 109), Quine sees philosophers as scientific theorists of a more general sort.¹⁸

Wittgenstein's and Quine's forms of naturalism, broadly construed,

represent the only options open to the aspiring naturalist with the general linguistic orientation of twentieth-century philosophy and with a sensitivity to the shortcomings of earlier forms of naturalism.¹⁹ Unlike Wittgenstein's critical naturalism, which claims that metaphysics makes no sense, Quine's scientific naturalism claims that good metaphysics makes good scientific sense and bad metaphysics makes bad scientific sense. Quine expresses the difference between these two forms of naturalism as follows:

... the Vienna Circle had already pressed the term "metaphysics" into pejorative use, as connoting meaninglessness; and the term "epistemology" was next. Wittgenstein and his followers, mainly at Oxford, found a residual philosophical vocation in therapy: in curing philosophers of the delusion that there were epistemological problems.

But I think that at this point it may be more useful to say rather that epistemology still goes on, though in a new setting and a clarified status. Epistemology, or something like it, simply falls into place as a chapter of psychology and hence of natural science.²⁰

Quine moved a large segment of Anglo-American philosophy in a naturalistic direction on a wide range of philosophical topics—language, logic, mathematics, epistemology, and metaphilosophy. To appreciate the debt that the revival of naturalism owes to Quine, it suffices to look briefly at the role his arguments against intensionalism have played in recent American philosophy. The arrival of Carnap and Logical Empiricism on the American scene brought a sharp analytic/synthetic distinction which, being developed within sophisticated systems of formal semantics, seemed to vindicate Kant's metaphysical conception of philosophy as an attempt to explain synthetic *a priori* knowledge.²¹ Carnap's work in particular seemed to put the full authority of current logical philosophy behind a rapprochement between rationalism and empiricism.²² Logical Empiricism in its modern form thus compromised with empiricism and naturalism in the areas of language, logic, and mathematics by giving abstract objects sanctuary on the analytic side of the distinction and advocating the existence of necessary truths. In recognizing knowledge that cannot be accounted for with the empirical methods of natural science, Logical Empiricism seemed to present a formidable barrier to naturalism.

This barrier was seen to come crashing down with Quine's criticism of the analytic/synthetic distinction in "Two Dogmas of Empiricism."²³ This criticism was widely seen as practically eliminating

intensionalist approaches from the philosophical landscape. Extensional approaches of various sorts, all of which owe an enormous debt to Quine, came to dominate the landscape. For example, Quine's criticisms of intensionalism paved the way for Davidson's program; without those criticisms, few philosophers would have had sufficient "fear of being enmeshed in the intensional" to go along with Davidson's proposal to switch from the traditional "*s*" means that *p* paradigm of analysis to the extensionalist "*s*" is true if, and only if, *p* paradigm.²⁴ Also, the claim of extensionalist theories of possible-worlds semantics that there is no finer-grained notion of proposition than the one defined in terms of extensions in possible worlds would seem arbitrary and counterintuitive without Quine's criticisms of meaning.²⁵ With the collapse of the analytic/synthetic distinction and the eclipse of Carnap's logical empiricism, the way was open for a neo-Millian naturalism in which all truths are contingent (in the sense of being revisable on the basis of observation of nature), all objects are natural objects, and all knowledge is acquired on the basis of the empirical methods of the natural sciences.²⁶

Wittgenstein and Quine are, then, the makers of contemporary naturalism. Their arguments provide the necessary criticisms of Fregean intensionalism, the bulwark against the forces of Millian naturalism in the nineteenth century, and hence, the basic rationale for the recent revival of naturalism. Their versions of naturalism, linguistic therapy and naturalized epistemology, provide the two forms of naturalism now available. Therefore, if conclusions I–IV can be established, it remains to show only that Quine's arguments against intensionalism fail to rebut contemporary naturalism in every form. Accordingly, I will couple the arguments for conclusions I–IV with arguments that show, first, that Quine's criticisms of intensionalism are inadequate and, second, that without them the other major anti-intensionalist arguments, e.g., Davidson's and Putnam's, do not work. Accordingly, it will be a further conclusion of the present book that:

V. Contemporary naturalism is based on Wittgenstein's and Quine's arguments against intensionalist theories of meaning, and, since Quine's arguments also fail, there are no good arguments in support of contemporary naturalism.

4

In the context of philosophy today, V is a strong conclusion, but I think we can do better. Moreover, I think that an even stronger anti-naturalist claim is required. If we were to stop with conclusions I–V,

we would not address the logically next question of whether there is, as traditional non-naturalists have frequently insisted, beyond mere want of support, some inherent fallacy in programs to naturalize disciplines like logic, mathematics, language, and epistemology. If we did not address this question, we would forfeit the chance to strengthen significantly our case against naturalism. Therefore, I shall try to establish the further conclusion that there is some fallacy in the program to naturalize these disciplines. In the rest of this chapter, I will say a bit more about the form in which this question will be discussed.

Given Frege's role in stemming the tide of nineteenth-century naturalism, it is easy to see why intensional objects and traditional theories of meaning were the focus in Wittgenstein's and Quine's attempts to revive naturalism. Fregean senses create islands which challenge the naturalist claim that all branches of science form an epistemologically seamless web of belief about an ontologically uniform world. Hence, the naturalist response to Fregean non-naturalism has been to reject the theory of meaning in order to reject objects which bifurcate the ontological realm and which make knowledge of language and logic depend on a faculty of intuition over and above sense perception.

Although naturalists have generally felt that the price of doing without a theory of meaning is well worth paying, they would certainly find it preferable not to have to pay any price. It is in this connection that Chomsky's work assumes its special importance for the naturalism/non-naturalism controversy. Chomsky offers naturalists the prospect of a naturalism that is, in this one respect at least, preferable to Wittgenstein's and Quine's. Chomsky's theory of language suggests a way of splitting the ontological issue of a commitment to non-natural objects off from the scientific issue of the value of a theory of meaning in the study of natural language. It seems to offer the possibility of resuscitating the traditional theory of meaning without abandoning naturalism. That is, it seems to provide a framework within which we can do justice to the linguistic facts about synonymy, ambiguity, analyticity, etc. without committing ourselves to non-natural intensions.

Chomskyan linguistics seems to offer this possibility because it conceives the object of study in linguistics to be grammatical competence, i.e., the ideal speaker's knowledge of the language.²⁷ This enabled linguists to take the object of study in the theory of meaning to be a component of grammatical competence, namely, semantic competence, i.e., the ideal speaker's knowledge of the language's synonymy relations, ambiguities, analyticities, etc. Within Chomsky's

theory of grammatical competence, the notion of sense is a psychological, or biological construct; so, the theory of meaning, like the theory of semantic competence, is a theory in the natural sciences.

Indeed, it was just this prospect of developing traditional semantics within linguistics viewed as a natural science that first interested me in Chomsky's work. The aim of much of my early work was to formulate intensional semantics within the framework of Chomsky's theory of generative grammar.²⁸ At the time I began to work in linguistics, *Syntactic Structures* was the *Das Kapital* of the Chomskyan revolution. Since it contained no theory of the semantic component of a generative grammar, I undertook, together with Jerry Fodor and Paul Postal, to try to develop a theory of the semantic component and its place in a generative grammar.²⁹ I had various philosophical reasons for trying to show that a version of traditional semantics could be constructed within empirical linguistics. I wanted to find an alternative to the then current approaches in the philosophy of language. Carnap's artificial-language approach seemed to me to fail to provide a clear relation between semantic principles and the facts of natural language, and the ordinary-language approach seemed to me to concentrate too narrowly on facts of usage to the exclusion of any theory of the grammar of sentences. I wished to show that traditional semantics could be made responsive to facts of usage in a straightforward scientific way³⁰ and, thereby, restore to that theory the respectability it lost as a result of Quine's criticism.³¹

I thought that the theory of meaning could be given materialist foundations.³² My explicit goal was a naturalistic version of the theory of meaning within generative grammar understood as an empirical theory about the biology of human beings. Giving the traditional theory of meaning a place in the theory of generative grammar would resuscitate that theory without posing a threat to naturalism, because Chomsky had shown how to interpret the entire theory of generative grammar psychologically and, hence, naturalistically.³³

It is just such a viewpoint which, in the present context, suggests that naturalism does not have to turn its back on the facts about synonymy, ambiguity, analyticity, etc. with which the traditional theory of meaning was concerned, and hence, pay some price in antecedent plausibility. Chomsky's work thus raises the issue over naturalism in a new form. His psychological interpretation of formal theories of sentence structure becomes the focus of interest in the question of whether linguistic naturalism involves some sort of fallacy.

Chomsky's psychological interpretation of grammars is one interpretation of them, but not the only one. Before Chomsky, linguistics

was dominated by a school of thought on which the objects of grammatical study are physical sounds. The Chomskyan revolution changed the conception of grammar from that of a taxonomic analysis of speech sounds to that of a theory of the ideal speaker's grammatical competence, thus making it possible to treat sense as part of the grammatical structure of sentences even though it lacks any acoustic realization. Logically speaking, it is clear that this physicalistic interpretation is not the only alternative to Chomsky's psychological interpretation. Formal theories of grammatical structure could be interpreted as theories of abstract objects, like formal theories in logic or mathematics. Generative grammars could be understood as theories of the structure of sentences in the sense in which a realist about mathematics understands arithmetic as a theory of the structure of numbers. This alternative presents a new way to pose the issue over naturalism in linguistics, namely, as the question of whether imposing a psychological interpretation of theories in linguistics—as Chomsky does and as any naturalist who wished to avoid paying the price of jettisoning the traditional theory of meaning would—is correct.

Posing the issue in this way immediately suggests an extension of our argument against naturalism. Recall G. E. Moore's thought that naturalistic interpretations of moral theories lead to a fallacy in the definition of moral concepts.³⁴ Moore's naturalistic-fallacy argument has, to be sure, been subjected to extensive criticism, but, perhaps, despite mistakes in his formulation, Moore was on to something. I think he was right that naturalistic interpretation of ethical theory involves a fallacy of definition. Moreover, I think the fallacy is more general, arising also when theories in logic, mathematics, and certain other areas are interpreted naturalistically. In particular, I think a fallacy arises when theories of natural language are understood in psychological or biological terms. Hence, if we can reconstruct Moore's notion of a naturalistic fallacy and show that, in the reconstructed sense, such a fallacy does arise with respect to language, we will significantly strengthen our case against naturalism. Accordingly, the final conclusion I will argue for in this book is the following:

VI. The philosophical claim that theories of natural language should be interpreted naturalistically commits a fallacy.

Here is a brief overview of my argument in this book. It begins with a comprehensive examination of Wittgenstein's critique of theories of meaning. The aim of this examination is to establish conclusions I–IV. I then turn to Quine's criticisms of theories of meaning, the other pillar of contemporary naturalism. I try to show that these criticisms,

despite their wide influence, are inadequate. I next consider the anti-intensionalist criticisms of philosophers like Davidson, Putnam, Burge, etc. which have generally been seen as independent, at least to some extent, of Quine. I try to show that these criticisms depend completely on Quine's arguments. This completes the argument for conclusion V. After this, I present an argument for conclusion VI which, though in the spirit of traditional non-naturalism, is based on a novel conception of the naturalistic fallacy. I conclude with a chapter on the implications of these specific results and of the non-naturalism they support for how philosophical problems should be understood.