

Wittgenstein and Austin on
‘What is in Common’:
A Neglected Perspective?

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to shed light on what I claim is a neglected aspect in the writings of later Ludwig Wittgenstein and J. L. Austin. I badge this the ‘unity problem’. Many interpreters tend to underestimate, or ignore, this important aspect, and to focus instead on what I will call the ‘compatibility problem’. The compatibility problem focuses on cases where philosophers say something which we would not say in ordinary language, or when philosophers violate its rules. According to this reading, Austin and Wittgenstein show philosophers that this is a source of traditional philosophical troubles.

I argue for a different reading. My claim is that Austin and Wittgenstein think, instead, that in some specific cases philosophical trouble arises because philosophers look for one common thing in all cases where the same word is used. The aim in these cases is not to identify strings of words that we would not ordinarily say, rather it is to show that looking for something common to all cases in which we use the same word is problematic. This is the ‘unity’ problem.

I will examine how both philosophers characterise the unity problem, and how they demonstrate that there is something misleading in looking for one common thing in all the cases in which we use the same word. This constitutes what might be termed the ‘theoretical’ part of the thesis. Alongside this, I will examine key examples of Wittgenstein’s and Austin’s application of this ‘theory’ to their treatment of specific philosophical problems. These applications constitute some of the central examples in their writings, such as ‘understanding’ for Wittgenstein, and ‘truth’ for Austin. I will argue that their work on these examples does not fit comfortably into the framework of the compatibility problem, and is better viewed through the lens of the unity problem.

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Preface

1. Motivation and problems

There are many philosophers who are considered members of the school of ordinary language philosophy (OLP), including later Ludwig Wittgenstein, J. L. Austin, Gilbert Ryle, P. F. Strawson and others. In this thesis I focus on the writing and interpretation of later Wittgenstein and Austin. My claim is that the focus of many commentators on one particular approach to their philosophy tends to neglect another important perspective.

I will argue that most interpreters focus on what I will call the ‘compatibility problem’. The compatibility problem concerns cases either where philosophers say something which we would not say in ordinary language (OL), or when philosophers violate the rules of OL. OLP is supposed then to show philosophers that this is a source of traditional philosophical trouble in cases such as the mind-body problem, the nature of truth... etc., and that philosophers need to take into account how we use OL in resolving these difficulties.

I argue for a different reading. I want to bring out and highlight a neglected thread in Austin’s and Wittgenstein’s writings in which, I claim, they are better seen as tackling a different problem: namely that, in some instances, philosophical trouble arises because philosophers look for one common thing in all cases where the same word is used. This I badge the ‘unity problem’. In such cases, the aim of the appeal to OL is not to identify specific sentences or strings of words that we would not say in OL, it is rather to show that it is the looking for something ‘in common’ which is problematic.

The principal aim of this thesis, then, is to examine this neglected aspect in the writings of Austin and Wittgenstein. I will examine how both philosophers identify the unity problem, and how they

demonstrate that there is something misleading in looking for one common thing in all the cases in which we use the same word. This constitutes what might be termed the ‘theoretical’ part of the thesis. Alongside this, I will also examine key examples of Wittgenstein’s and Austin’s application of this ‘theory’ to their treatment of specific philosophical problems. These applications constitute some of the central examples in their writings, such as ‘understanding’ for Wittgenstein, and ‘truth’ for Austin. I will argue that their work on these examples does not fit comfortably within the framework of the compatibility problem, and is better viewed through the lens of the unity problem.

In doing so, I assess and challenge some of the most influential readings of OLP and Wittgenstein and Austin, suggesting that by focusing on the unity problem the work of Austin and Wittgenstein can be seen in a new and revealing light. Of course, aspects of the unity problem have been addressed by commentators before, but, I claim, such treatment has underestimated the overall importance of such an approach and, in many cases, has ignored key insights.

2. Plan and arguments

As outlined above, the thesis examines Wittgenstein’s and Austin’s work on the unity problem. In chapter 1, I set out the background to this study and introduce two prominent ways of reading OLP. The ‘corrective interpretation’ broadly identifies violations of ordinary language rules by philosophers and demands correction, whereas the ‘suggestive interpretation’ makes a similar comparison between what philosophers say and our ordinary usage, but merely advises, or engages in dialogue with, the philosopher. I will demonstrate that, in reading Wittgenstein and Austin, both interpretations focus on the compatibility problem and neglect the unity problem.

The next four chapters constitute the core of the thesis, and examine and analyse Wittgenstein's and Austin's treatment of the unity problem in detail. Chapters 2 and 3 discuss Wittgenstein's work on the unity problem, and Chapters 4 and 5 Austin's. In each pair of chapters, the first chapter sets out the 'theoretical' aspects, analysing the sense in which Wittgenstein and Austin identify what is in common, the problems they find with such an approach, and the alternatives they offer. The second chapter in each pair then tackles in detail specific central examples from each philosopher's writing, analysing how their particular approaches to the unity problem operate in the context of discussing particular philosophical problems.

Thus, in chapter 2, I follow how Wittgenstein treats the unity problem in *The Philosophical Investigations (PI)*, focusing on passages 65-67. Here, Wittgenstein argues that there need not be one common thing in virtue of which we use the same word in different cases, and that there might instead be different kinds of relations and affinities between the cases for which we use the same word. I term these concepts 'family concepts', in contrast with 'common feature concepts'. In this chapter, I discuss a number of different interpretations given to passages 65-67, and argue for a particular reading.

In chapter 3, I examine Wittgenstein's answer to the unity question in the context of his discussions on 'understanding' in *PI*. I claim that Wittgenstein shows that there need not be something in common in all the cases where we use the word 'understanding', and argue that his discussion of 'understanding' does not fit well within the framework of the compatibility problem, but, rather, should be viewed as tackling the unity problem. In the passages examined, Wittgenstein's view is that what philosophers say is, in fact, compatible with OL, but the mistake they make is to look for one common feature, and it is this that leads them into philosophical troubles.

In chapters 4 and 5 I move to Austin's work. In chapter 4 I conduct a similar 'theoretical' examination to that undertaken with Wittgenstein, and analyse Austin's answer to the unity question, using reconstructions and extracts from Austin's works. Austin tackles the question by attacking the answer given by philosophers who adopt the false dichotomy that a word either has just one and the same meaning in all instances of its use, or is ambiguous and has a number of totally different meanings. In opposition to this, Austin wants to show that there are some words which have a range of different-but-related-meanings. The problem is that philosophers ignore these kinds of words. I will focus on Austin's work on three particular word types: 'trouser-words', 'dimension-words' and 'adjuster-words'. The most important of these is dimension words. Dimension words, according to Austin, do in fact have a common stable component in all uses, the abstract meaning or semantic function. However, Austin is at pains to point out that this common abstract layer is almost always too thin to bear any philosophical weight in real situations. This is borne out in chapter 5, where I examine Austin's theory in the context of specific philosophical problems, in particular his discussions on 'real' and 'truth'.

Austin complains that philosophers tend to focus on what is in common, and to ignore the differences between the different cases where we use the same word. In the passages I examine, I do not deny that it is often possible to read Austin as reminding philosophers how ordinary language works and showing that their approach is inconsistent with this usage. My point, however, is that attention to the unity problem alongside Austin's analysis of the particular types of words both better represents Austin's position and better explains how philosophers come to make the mistakes that they do, including the error of using language in a way that runs counter to ordinary language usage. Thus there will, on occasion, be lessons for philosophers concerning the use of ordinary language, but my contention is that focusing almost exclusively on these findings, as those who view his

work through the compatibility problem lens do, is a far less profitable route from the perspective of explaining Austin's thought, as well as being a less legitimate strategy so far as interpretation of his work is concerned.

In the last chapter, I summarise my findings and draw together the threads from each of the chapters. Whilst my analysis makes it clear that there are important differences between Wittgenstein's and Austin's positions, I claim that it is also apparent that, in the instances examined, the unity problem is a more plausible and productive framework through which to view important parts of both of the philosophers' writings. I claim that both Wittgenstein and Austin demonstrate the need for caution in presuming answers always lie in some sort of common feature or irreducible factor when undertaking philosophical enquiry, and that both demonstrate how such investigations can go astray if sufficient attention is not paid to clear counterexamples and the importance of context. The thesis is very careful not to extrapolate its findings beyond the ambit of the specific examples analysed, but, equally, I do not claim that such instances exhaust the possible application of the framework I recommend.

Chapter 1

Ordinary Language and Philosophy

Introduction

Philosophers generally considered members of the school of OLP include later Wittgenstein, Austin, Ryle, Strawson, and others. Within this school and its literature, interpretation is a key preoccupation, and two ways of reading OLP are particularly prominent. The ‘corrective interpretation’, broadly identifies violations of ordinary language rules by philosophers and demands correction, whereas the ‘suggestive interpretation’ makes a similar comparison between what philosophers say and our ordinary usage, but merely advises, or engages in dialogue with, the philosopher. This thesis concentrates on the writing of Wittgenstein and Austin, and the question of which these two camps each philosopher better fits within is fiercely contested within the secondary literature, however, resolving this dilemma is not my principal aim. Rather, I will question what seems to be a fundamental presupposition concerning the nature of the underlying problem made by both interpretive approaches, arguing that adopting such a framework leads to a sort of tunnel vision which results in commentators overlooking an important thread in both philosophers’ writings.

I will argue that, in addressing Wittgenstein’s and Austin’s views on particular philosophical problems, both interpretations focus on issues of *compatibility* between, on the one hand, what philosophers say and, on the other, how ordinary language is used (the key difference between interpretations being in terms of the actions required of philosophers once this common lens has been applied and differences identified). This method, I claim, is too restrictive and fails to accommodate an alternative approach, one that takes Austin and Wittgenstein to, at times, be concerned with employing a different approach.

In this thesis, therefore, I make a distinction between the nature of the general ‘problem’ OL philosophers typically presume to underlie, or be the root cause of, a host of particular philosophical problems (the issue of compatibility, shared by both interpretations), and the force of the role ascribed to OL in (re)solving philosophical problems, the latter depending on the particular interpretive school being employed. I will argue that, so far as the former is concerned, the general presumption of a ‘compatibility problem’ is too exclusive, and that viewing a number of important philosophical issues in light of what I call the ‘unity problem’ is more productive, and represents more accurately the way in which both Wittgenstein and Austin demonstrate what is going wrong in the particular problems under discussion. So far as the latter is concerned, the aim of this thesis is not to draw a general conclusion, but it will become apparent, when the treatment of particular problems by Wittgenstein and Austin are examined in depth, that I think that neither philosopher fits exclusively into either account.

So far as this chapter is concerned, I will firstly explain in greater depth the two main interpretations of OLP (section 1), before, in section 2, explaining in detail the compatibility and unity problems, and why I find the exclusive focus of both interpretations on the former unsatisfactory. Finally, in section 3, I will address particular differences between Austin and Wittgenstein, clarifying their relevance to the topic of the thesis.

1. Two interpretations of OLP

Ordinary language philosophers generally hold that paying attention to the way in which ordinary language works, and highlighting differences between this and the way which philosophers use words, will assist in (re)solving philosophical problems. However, there are a number of differences in the way in which particular schools of interpreters understand what this practice consists in. I will focus primarily on two interpretations, both in the context of examining the philosophy of Wittgenstein and Austin. The first I call the ‘corrective’

interpretation, and the second the ‘suggestive’ interpretation. In what follows, I will describe each in more detail and explain the differences between the two, highlighting in particular the different role that the appeal to ordinary language is presumed to play in each.

1.1. The corrective interpretation

I will use two principal sources. The first is the corrective interpretation given to Wittgenstein by two of his most influential followers, P.M.S Hacker and Hans-Johann Glock. The second is the characterisation of the corrective interpretation given by John Searle and Paul Grice in posing one of the most influential objections to OLP¹.

1.1.1. The corrective interpretation of Wittgenstein

The main proponent of this reading is Hacker. He writes that ‘the problems of philosophy stem from failure to grasp the articulations of existing grammar...Describing the use of the words...is a matter of specifying or stating how words are used in the practice of speaking the language. Usage sets the standard of correct use; so the investigation is a *corrective* one. We must remind ourselves how we use the problematic expressions - that is to say what count in the practice of speaking our language as a correct use. So we are...stating *rules*...for the use of the expression.’ (Baker and Hacker, 2009, p. 291).

Hacker states that Wittgenstein appeals to everyday use to tabulate the rules which philosophers must not transgress: the mistake that philosophers commit is that they transgress these rules. Philosophical problems ‘are, directly or indirectly, solved, resolved or dissolved by conceptual investigation.’ (Hacker, 2009, p. 140). He adds that ‘[T]he features of our concepts that are marshalled for philosophical purposes

¹ Oswald Hanfling writes that Grice’s work ‘has been a powerful influence in the widespread rejection of that [OL] philosophy’. (Hanfling, 2000, p.176). Guy Longworth writes that ‘Grice’s work has played a central role in the negative reception of the core of Austin’s work...’ (Longworth, 2011, p.118).

are specified by conceptual truths,' and these conceptual truths 'describe aspects of the nature of their subject; they characterize the concept at hand; and they are manifest in the use of words.' (Hacker, 2009, p. 141).

Let us take an example. Hacker takes Wittgenstein to engage in such a conceptual investigation in his discussion of 'understanding': 'So, for example, 'understanding is an ability, not a mental state or process' is tantamount to the grammatical explanation that to say that someone understands something is not to say what mental state he is in or what process is taking place in his mind, but to indicate something he can do.' (Hacker, 2009, pp. 143-144.) Thus, according to Hacker, Wittgenstein seeks to establish, through conceptual investigations, that understanding is an ability, not a mental process or state. Wittgenstein elucidates the sense-determination rules for the use of the expression 'understanding' and, by the conceptual truths which are manifest in the use of words, he finds that it is nonsensical to say that understanding is a mental process or state, but it makes sense to say that understanding is an ability. Another example is found in Wittgenstein's treatment of 'the questions of whether machines can think or whether the brain can think... For such questions are concerned with what *does or does not make sense*. And the way to examine whether something does or does not make sense, for example whether it makes sense to say that computers think or that the prefrontal cortices think, requires methodical investigation of the use of the verb 'to think' and its ramifying logico-grammatical connections and presuppositions.' (Hacker, 2009, pp. 140-141). Again, the idea is that it is through investigating how we use words in OL that we will understand what makes sense and what does not and, consequently, be able to answer the particular philosophical question.

In the same vein, Glock explains that "'Grammatical rules' are standards for the correct use of an expressions which 'determines' its meaning"; (Glock, 1996, p. 150) those rules 'determine the prior

question of what it makes sense to say... [The function of these rules] is to *draw attention* to the *violation* of linguistic rules by philosophers, a violation which results in nonsense.' (Glock, 1991, pp. 77-78). Thus, like Hacker, Glock is clear that OL reminds philosophers of the rules that they must not transgress on pain of introducing nonsense. For example, Glock credits Wittgenstein with showing that scepticism is nonsensical through just such an approach. 'Scepticism ... is the view that knowledge is impossible, either in general or with respect to a particular domain...' (Glock, 1996, p. 336). The problem with scepticism, Glock explains, is that it violates the rules of OL, as shown by Wittgenstein's *PI* 246: 'If we are using the word "to know" as it is normally used (and how else are we to use it?), then other people very often know when I am in pain'. Thus, Glock comments: 'According to the rules of grammar, it makes perfectly good sense to say that I know that others are in pain'. (Glock, 1996, p. 337). The sceptic's position, that knowledge is impossible, is shown to be incompatible with our ordinary use of the word 'knowledge'.

The corrective interpretation, then, is a strong doctrine. Ordinary language sets the rules for correct usage and the boundaries between sense and nonsense. The ordinary language philosopher is charged with tabulating such rules, identifying violations by philosophers, and correcting their mistakes, particularly where philosophers say things that we don't, in fact, say in ordinary language. In this way, it is proposed, many philosophical problems are avoided or dissolved.

1.1.2. *The Searle/Grice interpretation*

One of the most influential objections to OLP was proposed by Searle and Grice. In order to introduce their objection, Searle and Grice give their own characterisation of the practices and methods of OL philosophers². Note that their interpretation does not focus on Austin

² The objection first appeared in Searle's essay 'Assertions and aberrations' (Searle, 2011), and was then developed and explained in Searle's *Speech Act* (Searle, 1969).

or Wittgenstein exclusively, but is rather an attempt to show the general approach of those philosophers who appeal to OL in order to (re)solve philosophical problems.

Searle writes: ‘The [OL] philosopher notices that it would be very odd or bizarre to say certain things in certain situations; so he then concludes for that reason that certain concepts are inapplicable to such situations.’ (Searle, 1969, p. 141). Here are some of Searle’s examples: Wittgenstein’s observation that we ordinarily don’t say ‘I know I am in pain’, B.S. Benjamin’s observation that we ordinarily don’t say ‘I remember my own name’, and Austin’s observation that we ordinarily don’t say ‘I buy my car voluntarily’ (Searle, 1969, pp. 141-143).

Searle then explains the method of OLP. The OL philosopher, after noticing that there are things we don’t say in OL, ‘claims that a certain concept or range of concepts is inapplicable to certain states of affairs because the states of affairs fail to satisfy certain conditions which the author [the OL philosopher] says are presuppositions of the applicability of the concepts... it does not even make sense to use the expression [in the above examples] ...because ...[it] requires certain special conditions for its applicability, which conditions are lacking’ in these examples. (Searle, 2011, p. 208). Grice gives a very similar characterization to the method of OL philosophers³: ‘[O]ne [the OL philosopher] begins with the observation that a certain range of expression, in each of which is embedded a subordinate expression α ...is such that its members would not be used in application to certain specimen situations, that their use would be odd or inappropriate or even would make no sense; one then suggests that the relevant feature of such situations is that they fail to satisfy some condition C... and

Grice discusses Searle’s view in detail and develops it in the first chapter of *The Ways of Words* (Grice, 1989).

³ Grice opens *The Ways of Words* with a prolegomena which discusses those inappropriate statements which Searle talks about, those things which we don’t ordinarily say. He uses the same examples Searle uses. See Grice, 1989, prolegomena.

one concludes that it is characteristic of the concepts expressed by α , a feature of the meaning or use of α , that $E(\alpha)$ is applicable only if C is satisfied.’ (Grice, 1989, p. 3).

Thus, according to Searle/Grice, the OL philosopher, after noticing that there are things which we would not say in OL, explains that the concept under discussion is used only when some specific condition is satisfied. For example, we don’t say ‘I know’ unless there is a suggestion that I might not know, and I would not add ‘voluntarily’ unless the action might be nonstandard, and so on. These conditions, the presence of uncertainty, and the action being nonstandard, are not satisfied in the philosophers’ uses of ‘I know I am in pain’ and ‘I buy my car voluntarily’⁴. Philosophers who say such things misuse the language. To use these concepts correctly, what we ordinarily say should be observed, and words should not be used as you like⁵.

So Searle and Grice agree with Hacker and Glock that there are things that we would not say in OL, and that Austin, Wittgenstein and other OL philosophers are trying to draw attention to these things. In addition, according to Searle and Grice, OL philosophers ask other philosophers to conform to OL, in order to avoid uttering nonsense. As a result, it is clear that Searle and Grice view ordinary language philosophy as corrective⁶.

⁴ Here we need some qualification. For ‘I know I am in pain’, it seems that the condition is never satisfied. For ‘I buy my car voluntarily’, it is not satisfied in the standard cases. However, for present purposes we can ignore the differences; the point is to characterize the main features of the corrective interpretation.

⁵ Grice gives a more complicated explanation. He suggests that we might think of three different positions that OL philosophers might take in order to explain why we don’t say these things in OL.

⁶ Searle offers an alternative explanation of why we don’t say these things in OL: ‘the reason it would be odd to say such things is that they are too *obvious* to be worth saying.’ (Searle, 1969, p. 141). The same line is taken by Grice, who thinks that what we would not say is ‘true... however misleading’. (Grice, 1989, p. 9). Both think that we don’t say these things because it is too obvious and trivially true to be said, not because it is nonsensical.

To summarise, corrective interpreters of OLP tabulate the rules of ordinary language, identify the things which philosophers say which violate these rules, demonstrate that such violations typically resulting nonsense, and recommend corrections in accordance with ordinary language usage.

1.2. The suggestive interpretation

The suggestive interpretation also traces the differences between what we ordinarily say and what the philosopher says, but does not see these differences as violations of rules which must be adhered to. Instead, the offending philosopher is merely asked to consider and take into account how ordinary language works.

I focus on suggestive interpretations of Wittgenstein and Austin in the next two sections, before examining one of the most influential suggestive readings of both, that given by Stanley Cavell and James Conant.

1.2.1. The suggestive interpretation of Wittgenstein

In his reading of *PI* 116, Gordon Baker⁷ focuses on Wittgenstein's 'What we do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use.' He (Baker) suggests a reading of this remark which illustrates the differences between the two interpretations of Wittgenstein's philosophy. He first characterizes his opponent's view, the corrective one.

According to that reading, 'metaphysical' 'means roughly the same as 'non-standard', 'deviant', or 'abnormal'... [Thus] philosophers *misuse* expressions, thereby speaking nonsense...The activity of clarifying concepts or describing grammar [bringing them back to

⁷ Early Baker works with Hacker and introduces the influential Baker and Hacker commentary to *PI*, which is the standard corrective interpretation to *PI*. Later Baker has a different reading, which is mainly suggestive. In what follows, when I refer to Baker and Hacker, I refer to the corrective interpretation. When I refer to Baker alone, I mean later Baker and his suggestive reading.

everyday use] is *corrective*...' (Baker, 2004, p. 94). He identifies Hacker's reading as the standard corrective account.

He then gives his own suggestive reading. '[N]o claim is made that this [everyday] use is sacrosanct or that we have no right to depart from it...[Rather] the point is to persuade 'the metaphysician' to clarify precisely why he is not content to stick to this familiar use in this particular context' (Baker, 2004, p. 103). The aim of bringing the words back to everyday use is to show that the metaphysical use is not compatible with everyday use, that there are differences between what the philosopher says and what we ordinarily say, and then to ask the philosopher why she is not satisfied with our ordinary use. There is no claim that we must conform to OL.

A similar interpretation is given by Rupert Read. He thinks that 'the crucial mistake in 'Wittgenstein studies' has generally been to misidentify the contrast class that Wittgenstein intended' between metaphysical and ordinary. The mistake is to think 'that philosophy can proceed ... by means of paying careful attention to the way we normally actually speak, and prohibiting uses that conflict with the way we normally actually speak.' (Read, forthcoming, p. 1). Read, inspired by Baker, thinks that: 'If the philosopher with whom we are in dialogue can convince us that he has developed a novel use (that has a use), then we should allow that this is part of the language. If, on the contrary, we can convince him that he has not specified a use for his words, then he allows that what he has come up with is nothing that has a sense.' (Read, forthcoming, p. 4). The suggestive method thus consists in asking the philosopher who uses language in a different way from the way we do in OL to examine the sense of his use, but there is no demand that he conforms to any rules of OL.

Baker and Read take the conversational part of the method, as well as the assent of the philosopher with whom we have the conversation, to be the key to understanding Wittgenstein's appeal to OL.

We move now to suggestive readings given to Austin's texts.

1.2.2. The suggestive interpretation of Austin

According to Austin, '[O]rdinary language is not the last word: in principle it can everywhere be supplemented and improved upon. Only remember, it is the first word.' (Austin, 1979, p. 185). The question is, in Austin's words, 'Why should what we all ordinarily say be the only or the best or final way of putting it?' (Austin, 1979, p. 183). Austin's answer to all these suggestions is that it should not. OL is not always the only, nor the best, nor the final word. The suggestive role of OL, that it is the first word, not the last word, and that it doesn't have a corrective role, that there is no demand to conform to OL in Austin's writings, was emphasised by his interpreters. For example, G. Warnock complains that amongst the views misattributed to Austin is the idea 'that 'ordinary language' is sacrosanct, immune of criticism and insusceptible of supplementation or amendment... [Austin] naturally recognized that it might in certain ways be confused or incoherent or even, for certain purposes, totally inadequate' (Warnock, 2011, p. 18). J. Urmson writes in a similar vein: 'Austin did not think that ordinary language was sacrosanct...all he asked was that we be clear about what it is like before we improve it'⁸ (Urmson, 2011, p. 24).

In the introduction to a new anthology on Austin, Martin Gustafsson writes that 'Austin is well aware that everyday patterns of use might prove insufficient to handle various practical and theoretical needs that

⁸ For an example of this distortion, see Hampshire, 2011, where he attributes to Austin two different theses on the relation between philosophy and OL, a strong one and a weak one. The strong one is corrective. Hampshire writes: 'For every distinction of word and idiom that we find in common speech, there is a reason to be found, if we look far enough, to explain why this distinction exists... If, as philosophers, we try to introduce an altogether new distinction, we shall find that we are disturbing the economy of the language by blurring elsewhere some useful distinctions that are already recognized' (Hampshire, 2011, pp. 33-34). According to the strong thesis, therefore, philosophers must conform to OL, and not try to change its rules. The weak thesis is not corrective; it states that we need to clarify the distinctions we have before the attempt to refine them.

can arise, and that such ordinary forms of usage might therefore have to be revised or abandoned.’ (Gustafsson, 2011, p. 14). Mark Kaplan, who is working on Austin’s epistemology, gives many examples of misreadings of Austin which attribute to him different forms of the corrective interpretation⁹. He objects that none of these examples ‘fit at all with what he [Austin] actually wrote’. (Kaplan, 2010, p. 805). By contrast, Kaplan’s interpretation is a suggestive one: ‘when we find our epistemological inquiries leading us to views at odds with what we would ordinarily say or do, [we are not asked]...to stop....We can either reconsider the path to which those enquiries have led us, or change what we are prepared to say and do in ordinary life to conform to our epistemological views.’ (Kaplan, 2010, p. 808). For Kaplan, either the philosopher is going to revise his reasons to depart from OL, or we are going to change how we use OL. There is no suggestion that OL sets correct standard rules, and that we have to conform to it.

The point is that Austin was explicit that OL is the first word, but not the last word. In other words, that OL has a suggestive role, not a corrective one. In that sense, it therefore seems that Baker/Read’s reading of Wittgenstein’s metaphysical/everyday use distinction is compatible with Austin position in holding that we need not conform to OL¹⁰.

⁹ See Kaplan, 2010, pp. 801-805.

¹⁰ However, Baker himself doesn’t see the similarities with Austin: he points to Austin as one of the representatives of the corrective interpretation, see Baker, 2004, p. 92.

Note that the similarity I refer to is mainly in the claim that we need not conform to OL. However, I don’t find any indication in Austin’s writings that he accepts the conversational method.

1.2.3. *The Cavell/Conant reading*

We move now to a more detailed examination of one of the influential suggestive readings of OLP, one which covers both Austin and Wittgenstein.

Cavell writes: *‘If it is TRUE to say “I know it” is not used unless you have great confidence in it”, then, when you are speaking English, it is WRONG (a misuse) to say “I know it” unless you have great confidence in it.’* (Cavell, 2002, p. 16). How should we understand such a statement? According to Cavell, questions on what we would and would not say are ‘asked of someone who has mastered the language... [and such a question is] a request for the person to say something about himself, describe what he does.’ (Cavell, 2002, p. 66). He adds, we are interested in ‘determining where and why one wishes, or hesitates, to use a particular expression oneself’, an expression which we would not use in OL. (Cavell, 2011, p. 61). Cavell thinks that statements such as ‘we would not say such and such’ are not supposed to show that philosophers need to conform to OL. Rather, they question the motives and reasons that the philosopher has for saying what he says, thereby encouraging him to give his reasons for departing from OL. This in turn allows a dialogue to take place, and it is this dialogue, and not the drawing of the bounds of sense which philosophers must not transgress, which Cavell takes to be the core of the appeal to OL.

James Conant’s aim in giving a reading of ‘what we would not say’ is similarly to undermine the corrective interpretation, and to introduce a version of the suggestive interpretation. According to Conant, Baker and Hacker’s corrective interpretation ‘conceives the possibilities of meaningful expression as limited by “general rules of the language”...and imagines that by specifying these rules one can identify in advance which combinations of words are licensed and which prohibited’ (Conant, 2001, p. 122). What the philosopher says when he departs from OL usage violates the rules of grammar, and

‘therefore there is something determinate he wants to mean but he *cannot* mean by his words.’ (Conant, 1998, pp. 249-250). In other words, we try to say, and mean, these things in philosophy, and we then utter nonsense. This is where, according to the corrective interpretation, the OL philosopher interferes, and points out that these things are nonsensical, that we don’t say them in OL, and that they are prohibited by the rules of grammar.

Conant’s view, however, is different. According to him, ‘Wittgenstein’s teaching is that the problem lies not in the words, but in our confused relation to the words: in our experiencing ourselves as meaning something different by them, yet also feeling that what we take ourselves to be meaning by the words make no sense.’ (Conant, 1998, pp. 247-248). Thus, the failure is not in any specific strings of words which are to be excluded and condemned as nonsensical, but rather in our failure to give meaning to our sentences. Conant thinks that what actually goes on in the cases under discussion is something like this: the philosopher imagines that he means something where he doesn’t, and he calls this the hallucinations of meaning. Instead of nonsense consisting in independent strings of words, which we try to mean but we can’t, nonsense is in our own confused imagining that we mean something.

Thus, the main difference between Conant’s approach and the corrective interpretation consists in where nonsense is to be identified. Rather than in the strings of words which don’t make sense, Conant takes Austin and Wittgenstein to identify the problem in the attempt to mean something where nothing at all is meant. As a result, he finds the corrective interpretation unsatisfactory, and, since no particular string of words is prohibited, it follows that there is no corrective role for OL in the way outlined by, for instance, Hacker. In other words, there is no point in tabulating the rules, because the rules don’t draw the lines between what makes sense and what doesn’t. The line is

drawn in our relation to what we mean, not in the strings of words independent of what we want to say and mean.

Since the problem is related to the attempt of the philosopher to mean something nonsensical, Cavell and Conant focus instead on deploying the conversational method which, they believe, will be the more appropriate to helping the philosopher himself to see that what he is trying to mean is nonsensical.¹¹

From the above discussion, the differences between the two approaches or interpretations should be clear. Whilst both diagnose problems in philosophy as stemming from differences between what philosophers say and what we ordinarily say, instead of characterising such differences as violations of rules which must be corrected, as is the case in the corrective interpretation, the suggestive interpretation seeks to prompt the philosopher, highlighting the problems that this departure from ordinary language engenders, ultimately leaving any action, corrective or otherwise, to the philosopher's choice.

2. Interpretation and the 'Unity' and 'Compatibility' problems

In examining and explaining the two different general ways of reading ordinary language philosophers, and Austin and Wittgenstein in particular, we saw that both interpretations started by identifying discrepancies between ordinary language use and what philosophers say. Although the two readings disagree about what should be done when such discrepancies are encountered, whether they should be corrected or merely considered, both diagnose this lack of compatibility between philosophical and ordinary use as the underlying cause of a variety of philosophical problems. This

¹¹There are differences between Cavell and Conant on reading Austin: Cavell criticises Austin, as we will see below, for not being clear on the method and the role of the appeal to OL. See Cavell, 2011. Conant seems to ignore the differences between Austin and Wittgenstein. See Conant, 2011.

‘compatibility problem’ is cited in all the above examples offered by Grice, Searle, Hacker, Glock, Conant and Cavell, and is taken, it seems, to be the initial concern for all ordinary language philosophers, and particularly Wittgenstein and Austin.¹²

However, I will argue that in representing Wittgenstein and Austin in this way, i.e., as being initially always focused on the compatibility problem, key insights into their philosophy are neglected. Instead, I claim that their focus is often on a different problem, and that Austin and Wittgenstein think, in some cases, philosophical trouble arises because philosophers look for one common thing in all cases where the same word is used. I badge this concern the ‘unity problem’. The aim of the appeal to OL in these cases is not to point out the things which we would not say in OL, rather it is to indicate that ordinary language shows that it is the looking for something common to all cases in which we use the same word that is problematic.

Wittgenstein discusses the issue of what it is that is common, and whether there is any such thing, in *PI* 65-67. In *PI* 65, in response to an interlocutor demanding a definition of a language game, he writes: ‘Here we come up against the great question that lies behind all these considerations.—For someone might object against me: "You take the easy way out! You talk about all sorts of language games, but have nowhere said ... what is common to all these activities, and what makes them into language or parts of language.”’ The great question, then, is what is common to all these activities we call language. In *the Blue Book*, Wittgenstein calls looking for a common feature a

¹² Note that none of these interpreters completely ignores the unity problem. For example, the discussion of projection in Cavell’s *The Claim of Reason* might be understood as a discussion of the unity problem and the compatibility problem. In addition, there are many discussions of the issue in Baker’s later works, Read and in other writings of suggestive interpreters from different points of view. However, it seems fair to say that in their attempt to reply to corrective interpretations, suggestive interpreters, focus on the compatibility problem and on giving a different reading to it.

tendency 'to look for something in common to all the entities which we commonly subsume under a general term'. (Wittgenstein, 1958, p. 17). But how can we tell if there is a common thing? According to Wittgenstein, we need to look at concrete cases to see if there is one. 'Don't say: "There must be something common, or they would not be called 'games' "—but look and see whether there is anything common to all.' (*PI* 66) Thus, we should not assume that there must be a common thing; we have to look and see if there is one. As we shall see in chapter 2, he suggests that we might use the same word in different cases because of different kinds of relations and affinities.

Austin takes a pretty similar line. According to him, as we shall see in chapter 4, philosophers think that there must be something in common in virtue of which we use the same word in different cases. He scrutinises this assumption and argues that in OL things are more complicated than this. In his examination of the question 'what is real?', Austin points out that the term 'real' 'does not have one single, specifiable, always-the-same *meaning*... *Nor* does it have a large number of different meanings - it is not *ambiguous*, even "systematically."' (Austin, 1962, p. 64). According to Austin, there are words that have always-the-same-meaning, and, on the other hand, there are ambiguous words like 'bank', which can mean either a financial institution or the edge of a river, meanings that are completely different. But there is also, he thinks, a middle ground between always-the-same meaning and ambiguity, and many philosophers neglect the middle ground. As a result, they fall into a false dichotomy: 'one meaning/ambiguity', which often causes them erroneously to look for one meaning for each word. Were they to study ordinary language properly, Austin claims, they would find that many words have, instead, a number of different but related meanings.¹³

¹³ There are differences between early Austin and later Austin which I ignore in this chapter for brevity, but I will address in chapter 4.

In particular, Austin argues, as we shall again see in chapter 4, that with certain types of word there might indeed be something in common, but that this commonality exists at an ‘abstract’ level, and that focusing on this common factor obscures the many differences that exist at the ‘concrete’, contextual level. As a result, philosophers who always make the focus of their enquiry the common feature are likely to make mistakes by failing to pay attention to this crucial aspect of ordinary language.

Thus, the purpose of the appeal to OL in the case of the unity problem is to reach one of two conclusions. Either to show that there need not be something in common between all cases in which we use the same word (Wittgenstein mainly), or to show that, even in cases where there is something in common, it would be problematic and misleading to ignore the differences between the different cases where we use the same word (Austin mainly).

The central aim of this thesis is to show how important this unity problem is to a proper reading of Austin’s and Wittgenstein’s philosophy. Both, in slightly different ways, attack the assumption that there must be a common thing in all uses of the same word, and both want us to consider detailed examples in ordinary language in order to see how diverse and subtle the different uses of the same word can be and thus how inadequate philosophical analysis based solely on a presumed common feature could be.

The thesis will therefore distinguish throughout between the compatibility problem and the unity problem, and will focus on examples of the latter. As I said above, this does not mean that I take Wittgenstein and Austin to be unconcerned with the compatibility problem, but rather that neither takes it always to be the central problem in practising ordinary language philosophy. Thus, in analysing the specific examples from Austin and Wittgenstein in the following chapters, we will see that the question of compatibility with

ordinary language is important. However, in the cases discussed, the problem identified turns out not to be one of strict compatibility, because in such instances what philosophers say *is* in many cases compatible with ordinary language. Instead, the concern is that what they say is too narrow when the diversity of use in ordinary language and the way in which particular types of word or concept actually work in context is fully understood.

Thus, I will argue in chapter 3 that Wittgenstein's main aim in his discussion on 'understanding' is to show us that there is no one common meaning of understanding, and that he takes what the philosopher says to be compatible with OL but too restrictive, because the philosopher's looking for common meaning in all uses blinds him to the subtleties of ordinary language in context. In chapter 5 we will see that Austin highlights similar problems in his discussion of 'real' and 'true'. Ayer's account of 'real' is found to be compatible with OL but too narrow for the generalisations he makes, whereas the account of 'true' given by philosophers is also compatible with ordinary language, but only weakly so; philosophers in this case focusing on a thin abstract level instead of the more determinate concrete meaning that varies with the circumstances of use.

One of my overall claims, therefore, is that interpreters who focus on the compatibility problem misrepresent the actual examples of Austin and Wittgenstein, whichever doctrine of interpretation they follow. Cavell and Conant, as representative of the suggestive interpretation, Grice and Searle, as representative of opponents to OLP who nevertheless offer a corrective interpretation, and Hacker and Glock, as representative of corrective interpretation, all focus on the compatibility problem. My proposal is not that Austin and Wittgenstein ignore the compatibility problem, but that some of the central examples in their writings don't fit into this problem framework. This is why I take it that bringing out the discussion on the unity problem, and the centrality of it for Austin and Wittgenstein,

adds to our understanding in the wider context of ordinary language philosophy.

3. The differences between Austin and Wittgenstein

One of the features of this thesis is the emphasis placed on the common ground between Austin and Wittgenstein regarding their work on the unity problem, and, in support of this, I will offer a detailed analysis of how each tackles specific philosophical problems. However, whilst I will argue that it is potentially a mistake to interpret their work as if it were focused on, or presupposed, the compatibility problem, as many commentators do, it will also become clear that, even in their treatment of the unity problem, Austin and Wittgenstein differ in subtle ways. There are also, of course, significant wider differences between the two philosophers in their general approach, ambition, and method, and whilst the investigation of these is beyond the scope of the thesis, in what follows I will briefly touch on two specific differences in their stances in order to clarify the focus and purpose of the thesis. The first makes explicit the restricted scope of the analysis undertaken in the thesis with respect to how each applies the findings of ordinary language philosophy, whereas the second clarifies why differences in their views on the way in which a study of language should be conducted are relevant.

3.1. On philosophy and language

For Austin, the study of ordinary language might yield a variety of results. In some cases it will enable the philosopher to begin the study anew. Thus Austin writes, regarding his study of excuses, that ‘the philosophical study of conduct can get off to a positive fresh start...’ (Austin, 1979, p. 180). Equally, he thinks it might help in dissolving some philosophical problems. For example, in the introduction to *Sense and Sensibilia* (*S &S*) he says that this study will help us in ‘dissolving philosophical worries’. (Austin, 1962, p. 5) .Or it might have the effect that, ‘a number of traditional cruces or mistakes ... can

be resolved or removed.’ (Austin, 1979, p. 180). Lastly, it might open our eyes to the difference between what we ordinarily say, and what some philosophers say, but leave any decision open to us. For example, regarding his study of ‘if’s and ‘can’s, Austin comments that ‘[D]eterminism ... may be the case, but at least it appears not consistent with what we ordinarily say. (Austin, 1979, p. 231). Austin’s work, typically, discusses a philosophical issue by paying attention to what we ordinarily say and what the philosopher says, shows that there are differences, and allows that any one of a range of results might follow.

Wittgenstein’s approach is somewhat different. For him, after conducting the investigations of how we use the words in OL, ‘philosophical problems should *completely* disappear.’ (*PI* 133). In other words, ordinary language philosophy ought to be able to resolve philosophical problems, and, in so doing, render the range of outcomes that we saw Austin endorsed largely irrelevant.¹⁴

However, the purpose of this thesis is not to adjudicate on these differences. Instead, its aim is to show that viewing Austin’s and Wittgenstein’s OLP, and their treatment of specific philosophical problems, through the lens of what I have described as the ‘unity problem’ is an important, and often neglected, approach to interpreting their writing. It is the commonality of this framework with which I am

¹⁴ In addition, it seems that there is a difference between Austin and Wittgenstein on the very question of the nature of philosophical problems, and whether philosophical problems disappear or not depends on this. For a good discussion on this point, see Cavell, 2011. Cavell suggests that Austin doesn’t show the philosophical relevance of his study of OL; and he contrasts this with the articulation of what philosophy is about, and the relevance of the study of OL to philosophy, he finds in Wittgenstein. Cavell writes: ‘My assumption is that there is something special that philosophy is about... I emphasise that Austin himself was ...never anxious to underscore philosophy’s uniqueness, in particular not its difference from science.’ (Cavell, 2011, p. 61). This is one of Wittgenstein’s central claims: that philosophy is to be distinguished from science, see *PI* 109, and one of the main differences between Wittgenstein and Austin.

concerned here, rather than the differences in their wider views outlined above.

3.2. On studying language

Austin wants to contribute to a theory of language. He thinks that by the joint labours of philosophers, grammarians and students of language we might witness the birth of a ‘science of language’. (Austin, 1979, p. 232). In *How to do things with words (HTDW)* he seeks a classification of speech-acts and classifies different kinds of individual words in groups: adjuster words, excluders, and dimension words. In addition to his interest in how our misunderstanding of OL might affect philosophy, Austin is generally interested in language itself¹⁵. Wittgenstein is different, he is not interested in a science of language, or in language by itself. Rather, he is interested in philosophical problems. He describes how we ordinarily use the troublesome philosophical words and compares this with how philosophers use them, ‘[A]nd this description gets its light, that is to say its purpose, from the philosophical problems.’ (PI 109) There are no theoretical interests in Wittgenstein’s *PI* beyond philosophical problems. There is no attempt to advance a theory of how language works. In fact, ‘our considerations could not be scientific ones.’ (PI 109). Wittgenstein separates philosophy from science.

¹⁵ For example, in the introduction to *S & S*, he writes ‘we may hope to learn something positive in the way of a technique for dissolving philosophical worries...and also something about the meanings of some English words... which, besides being philosophically very slippery, are in their own right interesting’. (Austin, 1962, p. 5). Again, in ‘The Meaning of a Word’, where he mentions the debate between the nominalists and the realists, he says that the nominalists didn’t search the linguistic facts ‘which are, in themselves, interesting enough’. (Austin, 1979, p. 70). In both cases, he thinks that linguistic studies are, by themselves, interesting. Urmson writes that Austin ‘thought that the institution of language was in itself of sufficient interest to make it worthy of the closest study.’ (Urmson, 2011, p. 23). Guy Longworth states that for Austin ‘language use is a central part of human activity, so it’s an important topic in its own right’. (Longworth, 2011, p. 104). Hanfling writes that it ‘is clear, both from his writings and from the memoirs of those who remember his lectures, that Austin was fascinated by words and meanings in themselves, independent of their relevance to problems of philosophy.’ (Hanfling, 2000, p. 26).

These differences are reflected in the way in which each tries to answer the unity problem. In Wittgenstein's answer, his main concern is not to record how we actually use language, nor how to theorise about how language works. Rather, he wants to show that there need not be one common thing between all the cases in which we use the word. Looking for something in common generates philosophical troubles. On the other hand, Austin is seeking to record exactly how we use some specific words, and he is trying to classify the uses, as part of an attempt to form a larger theory.

The following four chapters can be seen as a theoretical study of language, in the way Austin sees his studies, or as descriptions of how we ordinarily use language in order to (re)solve some philosophical problems, as Wittgenstein sees his endeavours. The thesis is neutral as to both claims. The focal point here is the similarity between them, as explained above: how they tackle the unity problem, and take it to be of one of the central problems.

4. Summary

In this chapter I introduced two main interpretations to OLP, the corrective interpretation and the suggestive interpretation. The former identifies violations of ordinary language rules by philosophers and demands correction, whereas the latter makes a similar comparison between what philosophers say and our ordinary usage, but 'merely' advises, or engages in dialogue with, the philosopher. I then made a distinction between the nature of the general 'problem' OL philosophers typically presume to underlie, or be the root cause of, a host of particular philosophical problems and the force of the role ascribed to OL in (re)solving philosophical problems. My aim was to highlight that there are different 'problems' addressed by Austin and Wittgenstein, and that most interpreters in both camps focus on one problem, the compatibility problem, the problem that arises when

philosophers violate the rules of OL. This focus, I claim, is too restrictive and does not take into account some of the central examples in the writings of Austin and Wittgenstein. These are better viewed through the lens of what I called the ‘unity problem’.

In the second section, I introduced the ‘unity problem’, outlining that for Austin and Wittgenstein there will be cases where what philosophers say *is* compatible with OL, and so the source of the particular philosophical problem is not one of compatibility, as generally presumed. Instead, trouble arises in such cases because philosophers look for a single common element present in all instances where the same word is used. I made it clear that we should expect to see, in the detailed analysis undertaken by the thesis, differences between Austin and Wittgenstein regarding the exact treatment of this problem. For instance, for Wittgenstein there need not be something in common between all cases in which we use the same word, whereas for Austin there might be, although even in cases where there *is* something in common, he thinks it would be problematic and misleading to ignore the differences between the different cases where we use the same word.

The next four chapters address the unity problem. In chapters 2 and 3, I analyse and discuss Wittgenstein’s work on the unity problem, and in chapters 4 and 5 I address the same issues in Austin’s writing. In each pair of chapters, the first chapter sets out the ‘theory’ each philosopher takes: what they find problematic with the presumption that we should look for something common to all instances of the word’s use, and the alternative approaches they offer. The second chapter in each pair analyses the specific treatment given by each philosopher to particular philosophical problems in which the search for a common element has been the root cause of the problem. The overall aim is to demonstrate that viewing the work of both philosophers through the compatibility problem lens, and ignoring the perspective offered by an analysis of the unity problem, is too narrow

an approach, and one which will inevitably ignore important insights that Austin and Wittgenstein bring to bear on philosophical problems.

Chapter 2

Wittgenstein and the unity question

Introduction

This chapter and the next address Wittgenstein's work on the unity problem. Usually, Wittgenstein is considered one of the main figures in OLP, along with Austin, Ryle, and Strawson. Most interpreters, as we have seen in the first chapter, tend to conceive OLP as focusing on the compatibility problem, which is applied to various philosophical problems, such as the mind-body problem, the nature of truth... etc. The compatibility problem is concerned with cases where philosophers say something which we would not say in OL. Interpreters take this to be the mistake that philosophers commonly commit and the source of philosophical problems. In this thesis, however, I argue for a different perspective and a reassessment of the way in which the interpretation of Wittgenstein's and Austin's work is approached. I want to bring out and highlight a neglected thread in key parts of Austin's and Wittgenstein's writings where they appear to tackle a different issue from the compatibility problem. Their stance is not to claim that what philosophers say is incompatible with OL, in many of the instances is examined it is not, but rather they seek to show how philosophers are led into philosophical trouble because they look for one common feature in all cases in which we use the same word. In chapter 1 I called this the 'unity problem'.

In this chapter, I will examine Wittgenstein's treatment of the unity question, largely as it appears in the *PI* 65-67. Here, Wittgenstein argues that there need not be one common thing in virtue of which we use the same word in different cases, and that there might instead be a number of different kinds of relations and affinities that determine usage of the same word. I term these concepts 'family concepts', in contrast with 'common feature concepts'. In the following chapter, I

examine concrete examples from the *PI*, in the context of discussing some philosophical problems, where Wittgenstein tries to show that the concept discussed in each of these examples need not have something in common in all its uses. As a result, I will argue that these examples are better seen through the lens of the unity problem rather than focusing on issues of compatibility with ordinary language.

1. *PI* 65-67

Most interpreters take Wittgenstein to propose that, for some concepts, there need not be one defining common feature, and there are overlapping similarities which justify our calling different things by the same word. They term these concepts ‘family resemblance concepts’, in contrast to ‘common feature concepts’. The first two interpretations we examine, interpretations A and B, adopt this reading. Interpretation C, to which I adhere, takes Wittgenstein to say that there are different kinds of relations and affinities, and that similarities are only one kind of these relations. Interpretation C is therefore not inconsistent with A and B, but goes further, regarding ‘family resemblance concepts’ as just one kind of ‘family concepts’. I will claim that there is undue focus on the notion of similarities in the relevant secondary literature, and this somewhat narrow approach can be misleading and is not justified by close attention to the text. In what follows, I will examine Wittgenstein’s *PI* 65-67, and then analyse the three different interpretations given to these passages.

In *PI* 65-67, Wittgenstein gives three examples, suggesting in each case that there is no one defining common feature that determines usage. The first example is ‘language’. In *PI* 65, Wittgenstein faces ‘the great question’. He writes: ‘Here we come up against the great question that lies behind all these considerations.—For someone might object against me: “You take the easy way out! You talk about all sorts of language games, but have nowhere said ... what is common to all these activities, and what makes them into language or parts of

language.”” Since Wittgenstein doesn’t give a definition of a language-game, a topic he was discussing in the previous passages, his interlocutor objects and demands one, a definition in terms of a common feature which defines the concept discussed. The great question is: what is common to all these activities we call language?

Wittgenstein’s answer is straightforward, ‘[I]nstead of producing something common to all that we call language, I am saying that these phenomena have no one thing in common which makes us use the same word for all,— but that they are *related* to one another in many different ways. And it is because of this relationship, or these relationships, that we call them all "language".’ According to Wittgenstein then, there is no one common feature in virtue of which we call different things by the same word ‘language’, but, instead, the use of the term is governed by the existence (or otherwise) of different kinds of relations, and it is these that determine whether we call particular phenomena ‘language’.

The second example is ‘games’, and is discussed in *PI* 66. ‘Consider for example the proceedings that we call "games". I mean board-games, card-games, ball-games, Olympic Games, and so on. What is common to them all?—Don’t say: "There *must* be something common, or they would not be called 'games' "—but *look and see* whether there is anything common to all.—For if you look at them you will not see something that is common to *all*, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that.’ If you look and see, you won’t find one common feature, but you find overlapping features between the different activities we call games, features such as losing, winning, entertainment, patience, skill, luck, etc., none of which is necessarily present in every game. ‘And the result of this examination is: we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail.’ In *PI* 67-a, Wittgenstein calls these overlapping similarities ‘family resemblances’. ‘I can think of no better expression to characterize

these similarities than "family resemblances"; for the various resemblances between members of a family: build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, etc. etc. overlap and criss-cross in the same way.' Thus, there need not be one common feature between all the members of the family, and it is not even necessary that there should be an overall similarity between all members of the family (although there may be on occasion). It will be sufficient for there to be different local overlapping similarities between members of the family, as is the case in games.

The third example, 'number' is given in *PI* 67-b: 'the kinds of number form a family in the same way. Why do we call something a "number"? Well, perhaps because it has a—direct—relationship with several things that have hitherto been called number; and this can be said to give it an indirect relationship to other things we call the same name. And we extend our concept of number as in spinning a thread we twist fibre on fibre. And the strength of the thread does not reside in the fact that some one fibre runs through its whole length, but in the overlapping of many fibres.' The analogy of fibres within a thread is an excellent one, and brings out very clearly the distinction between global and local similarity made in the previous paragraph. The lack of dependence on a single common feature (the single fibre that runs the length of the thread) in determining membership or otherwise of the family of uses emphasises, instead, the binding strength of the local relationships between uses (the individual, shorter fibres) which, taken together, constitute the overall family (the whole thread).

In *PI* 67-c, however, Wittgenstein discusses a potential objection. The objection is that we might say, after all, 'there is something common to all these constructions—namely the disjunction of all their common properties'. According to Wittgenstein, though, this is a triviality, a mere 'playing with words. One might just as well say: "Something runs through the whole thread— namely the continuous overlapping of those fibres.' The point, again, is that there is no one fibre that runs

its length, and the same is true for some words, where there is no one common feature in virtue of which we call different things by the same word. Instead, it is in virtue of the different local relations between the cases that we do so.

Wittgenstein's answer to the question 'do we call different things by the same word because of a common feature?' is therefore negative. However, it is important not to read this position as claiming that no concepts are common feature concepts. Rather, the three cases in point should be read as offering significant counterexamples to any claim that every analysis of the usage of the same word on different occasions should be driven by the search for a common feature.

I now turn to the examination of the three different interpretations of these passages.

1.1. Three interpretations of *PI* 65-67

In what follows I will discuss three interpretations of *PI* 65-67 in the secondary literature. I start with Interpretation A, which is the prevailing one, and the one which was first proposed historically. In 1.1.1, I explain this interpretation and the main objections raised against it. In 1.1.2, I move to Interpretation B, which attempts to meet some objections to interpretation A. I will argue that interpretation B fails in its ambition. Finally, in 1.1.3, I introduce Interpretation C. This interpretation includes aspects of the first two interpretations, and, although not prominent in the secondary literature, in my view better answers the objections raised. I will argue that it is the most appropriate and the closest to Wittgenstein's text.

1.1.1. Interpretation A

The prevailing interpretation, Interpretation A, takes Wittgenstein to be saying that it is because of the overlapping similarities, and not the

presence of a common feature, that we call different things by the same word. R. Bambrough is the first to explore this interpretation, with an influential article on ‘family resemblance’. He explains: ‘We may classify a set of objects by reference to the presence or absence of features ABCDE. It may well happen that five objects edcba are such that each of them has four of these properties and lacks the fifth, and that the missing feature is different in each of the five cases. A simple diagram will illustrate this situation:

e	d	c	b	a
ABCD	ABCE	ABDE	ACDE	BCDE

Here we can already see how natural and how proper it might be to apply the same word to a number of objects between which there is no common feature’ (Bambrough, 1960, pp. 209-210). This reading seems very much in line with the account of Wittgenstein’s three examples given above, and shows in a practical example how the presence of local similarities, rather than a common feature that persists across all examples, might be sufficient to provide a rationale for grouping particular activities under the same term. Bambrough takes it that, in addition to ‘games’, other words are treated by Wittgenstein in the same way: ‘reading’, ‘expecting’, ‘proposition’ and ‘number’ are all family resemblance concepts.¹⁶

In the same vein, Anthony Kenny writes: ‘General terms such as ‘game’, ‘language’ ‘proposition’ were applied not on the basis of the recognition of common features, but on the basis of family likeness.’ (Kenny, 2006, p. 177). Baker and Hacker write, ‘What makes the various activities called ‘games’ into games is a complicated network of similarities’. (Baker and Hacker, 1980, p. 326). And they add ‘[T]he investigations [PI] holds that ‘proposition’, ‘language’ and

¹⁶ See Bamborough, 1960, p. 211.

‘number’...are family-resemblance concepts...’ (Baker and Hacker, 2009, p. 224).

Thus, according to this interpretation, classifying an activity as a game does not require the activity to possess a feature common to all other games, nor need it be similar to all such activities in one particular way. Instead, its membership is validated or otherwise according to its possessing (or not) certain overlapping and criss-crossing similarities with some but not necessarily all of the set of activities dubbed ‘games’. Concepts that determine their extension in this way are called ‘family resemblance concepts’.

However, philosophers raise three main objections to this interpretation. The first objection is that one can always find *some* similarity between different things, and can always point out a resemblance between any two activities. Put in other words, in *some* respect everything resembles everything else. The criterion is therefore vacuous because, strictly speaking, I can justify calling any activity a game on the grounds that it resembles, in one way or another, one of the activities we call games. (There are different formulations of this objection in Baker and Hacker (2009), Bellaimey (1990), Mandelbaum (1995) and Prien (2004)).

The second objection that many commentators and interpreters have raised questions the consistency of interpretation A with Wittgenstein’s use of the term ‘family’. They object that the term seems to imply some kind of ‘genetic connection’ between the cases, a criterion different from interpretation A’s focus on overlapping similarities. After all, individuals are typically not classified as members of the family on the basis of their similarities to one another. The charge, then, is that interpretation A takes the opposite direction to that which is implied by Wittgenstein’s metaphor of ‘family’. (There are different formulations of this objection in Beardsmore (1995), Gert (1995), Mandelbaum (1995), and Prien (2004)).

The third objection concerns the apparently narrow way in which interpretation A reads *PI* 65-67. The claim is that it would be a mistake to confine our focus in this passage solely to consideration of similarities. Wittgenstein, they claim, clearly has a broader notion of what make us use the same word in different cases, namely that it is because of different kinds of relations and affinities, rather than purely because of similarities which are just one kind of relation or affinity. (There are different formulations of this objection in Gert (1995) and Sluga (2006)).

1.1.2. *Interpretation B*

Interpretation B seeks to answer the objections raised against interpretation A. As with interpretation A, interpretation B holds that, for some concepts, it is the overlapping similarities and not a common feature that justify our calling different things by the same word. However, in order to avoid the objections discussed above, it takes Wittgenstein's remarks about family resemblance as sociological-historical remarks. J. Hunter writes that 'in the evolution of language the extension of a concept may have been gradually enlarged' in different directions, and for different kinds of similarities. (Hunter, 1985, p. 54). The concept evolved and was extended to different things, and for each new instance there was a similarity with an existing concept which resembled the new phenomenon in at least one feature, and the word became family resemblance concept through this historical enlargement. One way of reading this account is as presenting objection 1 with a sort of historical *fait accompli*. In other words, it is a historical fact that the over-classification dangers envisaged by the objection, that everything resembles everything else in some way, have not come to pass. Concepts, instead, have evidently evolved successfully on the basis of local similarity and this evolution has not been marked by every new phenomenon or instance being classified under every available concept.

Bernd Prien also prefers interpretation B. He explains that the problem with interpretation A is that it ‘takes the presence of similarities to be a sufficient condition for an object’s falling under a concept.’ (Prién, 2004, p. 20). If we understand the simple presence of the similarities as a sufficient condition for subsuming different things under the concept, then the problem is that there are many similarities between the things we call X and the things we don’t call X, and ‘the extensions of concepts would have to be much wider than they actually are.’ (Prién, 2004, p. 20). Thus, for example, many things which we don’t call games nevertheless share similarities with the activities we *do* call games, and therefore, according to interpretation A we ought to call them games, but we do not. Prién therefore thinks, with some justification, that objection 1 is fatal to interpretation A.

However, according to Prién, interpretation B solves the problem by expanding the account of the role that similarities play in determining which objects fall under the concept. Like Hunter, he thinks that the historical facts show that when in the past we have been faced with a new phenomenon and it has been subsumed under a concept, this has occurred because it resembles, in some way or other, other phenomena similarly subsumed under that concept. However, whilst similarity is required, it is equally clear that our discriminations have, in fact, been more fine-grained. ‘Consequently, similarities are only necessary but not sufficient for extending a concept to a new object.’ (Prién, 2004, p. 20). As a result, ‘[W]hen an activity exhibits resemblances with games, it does not follow that the concept ‘game’ will be extended to this activity.’ (Prién, 2004, p. 20). Interpretation B thus does not give up the basis of interpretation A, but it avoids the unrestricted reliance on similarity which made interpretation A vulnerable to objection 1.

It seems to me that there are three problems that interpretation B has to face. The first arises if objection 1 is taken to be a *reductio* on the very idea of similarity governing classification. Thus, if the challenge

from the objector is that reliance on criteria of similarity alone will result in all phenomena being classified under all concepts, she is unlikely to be impressed by the historical account that shows that no such outcome has, in fact, occurred. Her response is likely to be that the absence of such a result confirms her objection that similarity alone cannot be the determining factor. However, Prien's amplification of Hunter's account, in which he recognises that similarity must be constrained in some way in order to account for the classifications we have historically made, seems to avoid this difficulty but at the cost of provoking a different concern.

This second problem for interpretation B is that it offers what might be characterized as a *descriptive* rather than an *explanatory* account¹⁷. In other words, it describes the outcome that has in fact occurred and presents it as a refutation of objection 1. However, in order to *explain* how this finer-grained discrimination has been possible, supporters of interpretation B surely have to offer some idea of how this might have occurred. Prien, as we have just seen, seems to recognise the need, but offers no explanation beyond the idea that some factors or other constrain the application of similarity.

Hunter, also shows some recognition of the issues and, perhaps, goes a little further. He states that when we face a new phenomenon either there is no problem in subsuming it under one concept, because we have learnt how to use such a concept, or there is a problem, and no appeal to similarities will solve the issue¹⁸. He therefore seems to recognise that some additional factor, in his account 'learning', must be involved, but he doesn't elaborate on what is to be learnt, and therefore his position could hardly be taken to be a knockdown

¹⁷ The key concern is to answer the 'How' question, which will be the focus of the next section – whether this is badged as 'explanatory' or merely a deeper level of 'description' is not material to my purpose.

¹⁸ See Hunter, 1985, pp. 55-56.

argument against the earlier objections, not least because his ‘learning’ explanation seems vulnerable to a potential regress in which the basis of the original discrimination (which is then learnt by others) remains mysterious. As a result, if Hunter and Prien are relying on their account of history to carry the day, significantly more work needs to be done to determine what the additional factor might be, and how it is going to meet objection. This is addressed in section 1.2.

Lastly, interpretation B appears to be open to objection 3. Recall objection 3: Wittgenstein has a broader notion of what make us use the same word in different cases than similarities alone, even if the application of similarities is constrained in some way. For him, our decisions about classification are governed by different kinds of relations and affinities of which similarity is just one kind. By focusing entirely on similarity, constrained or otherwise, proponents of interpretation B (and interpretation A) ignore this wider concern. I will argue that objection 3 is serious and is justified by close attention to the text of *PI* 65-67. As a result, I propose that a further interpretation, interpretation C, is necessary.

1.1.3. *Interpretation C*

According to supporters of interpretation C, Wittgenstein in *PI* 65-67 has a broader notion than similarities of the different relations which make us call different things by the same word. Interpretation C is, in fact, the combination of two suggestions of how to read *PI* 65-67 by two commentators, H. J. Gert and Hans Sluga. In what follows, I combine their suggestions into one interpretation. The result is a reading of *PI* 65-67 which, I claim, meets objection 3 and potentially avoids objection 2, if we regard Wittgenstein’s use of the term ‘family’ in a particular way. However, interpretation C does seem to have difficulties with objection 1, and consideration of this issue is taken up later in section 1.2.

Gert suggests that '[F]amily-making relations aren't necessarily relations of resemblance', and that there are many relations which make families, resemblances being just one kind. (Gert, 1995, p. 180). For example, Gert interprets *PI* 67-b, where Wittgenstein suggests that we have a family of cases which we call 'number' as follows: 'It's more natural... to think of numbers as forming a family on the basis of mathematical relations (addition, multiplication, squaring, etc.)' than on the basis of similarities. (Gert, 1995, p. 179). He also cites *PI* 65 and 108 where Wittgenstein talks about relations that make families, but doesn't talk about resemblance. Further support for Gert's position comes from *PI* 164, where Wittgenstein talks about 'family of cases' in the context of 'reading' and 'deriving', and *PI* 77, where he talks about 'family of meanings' in the context of 'good'. In neither passage does Wittgenstein mention similarities, nor does he mention 'family resemblance', referring only to the notion of 'family of cases'. According to Gert, Wittgenstein thinks there are, in fact, many different kinds of relations (including similarities) which make us use the same word in families of cases: whilst similarity is used in one example, 'games' in *PI* 66, the majority of examples do not explicitly rely on similarity or resemblance.

A similar reading is given by Sluga. He distinguishes between two kinds of relations which make us call different things by the same word. The first is the relation of 'kinship, of descent, of some sort of real and causal connection...the second is that of similarity, resemblance, affinity, and correspondence'. (Sluga, 2006, p. 14). Here, we have two different kinds of terms. Consider some of Sluga's examples: in historical accounts, he claims, kinship concepts are what we look for; we try 'to establish direct and real connections, causal links, dependencies and "influences".' (Sluga, 2006, p. 19). This is the case when we look at concepts in the history of Art or Philosophy, for example. On the other hand, we look for what might broadly be described as similarity concepts when we compare types of philosophical ideas, or when we examine in Art styles from different

cultures, for example. These do not require the sorts of causal connections necessary in the case of kinship concepts, which, in turn, do not require the presence of similarities. Sluga also recognises that there are cases where there is overlap between the two kinds of concept.

As noted earlier, interpretation C is based on a combination of both Gert's and Sluga's positions. As we have seen, what both commentators have in common is that they take Wittgenstein's position in the *PI* to be that there are different kinds of relation which make us call different things by the same word, and similarities represent just one kind of these relations. Because interpretation C is not wholly reliant on the notion of similarity or resemblance, it clearly answers objection 3 and may, as we will see in 1.2, go some way towards answering objection 1. However, objection 2 may still present a problem.

Objection 2 is concerned that the term 'family' seems to imply some kind of 'genetic' or causal connection between the cases, which seems to run counter to the claim that Wittgenstein suggests that the concepts are related by overlapping similarities. In other words, the problem is to do with the term 'family', and the issue is whether, in using that term, Wittgenstein implies a causal connection or not.

The text is not conclusive, and Sluga places much of the blame for the confusion at Wittgenstein's door. He suggests that Wittgenstein himself is responsible for the lack of clarity because he fails to maintain rigorously the distinction between family concepts and resemblance concepts in using the crucial, and much focused on, term 'family resemblance'. According to Sluga, Wittgenstein 'fails to appreciate the genuine difference between these two ways of speaking, and his characterization of family resemblance combines both in a

single formula'¹⁹. (Sluga, 2006, p. 14). For Sluga, the term 'family' does indeed suggest causal links, and he thinks that Wittgenstein, by using this term 'family', suggests some kind of causal connection. However, and here he agrees with objection 2, concepts determined by notions of similarity or resemblance typically have no need to call on causal connections in determining which phenomena fall under their banner. It is therefore misleading and confusing to use the term 'family resemblance' for types of concepts because the very idea of combining 'family' and 'resemblance' runs counter to their inherent incompatibility. As a consequence, Sluga suggests that it is better to stop using the term 'family resemblance' altogether.

Baker and Hacker, though, have a different perspective on the notion of 'family' and argue that 'the *genetic* explanation of resemblances among members of a family is irrelevant' (my italics). (Baker and Hacker, 2005, p. 155). Their view is that the point of the analogy with family resemblances in *PI* 67-a 'is to show us that there need be no common properties among the extension of a concept *in virtue of which* we deem them all to fall under the concept', the use of the term 'family' is not intended to make causal or genetic claims. (Baker and Hacker, 2005, p. 155). Thus, according to their reading, in using the term 'family resemblance' or 'family concept' Wittgenstein doesn't imply that there must be a causal connection, and the basis on which objection 2 was raised is false.

In constructing interpretation C, I prefer to adopt Baker and Hacker's reading of this issue. For me, the text does not support the strong genetic or causal reading of the term 'family', and it seems far more plausible, when Wittgenstein's use of the term in the context is examined, to take their weaker reading. Interpretation C therefore

¹⁹ Sluga refers to Nietzsche's work which takes family resemblance, as Sluga reads Nietzsche, to be dependent on kinship relations. So the similarities are results of the kinship relations. According to Sluga, Wittgenstein, influenced by Nietzsche, develops the idea in two different directions without realising it.

reads *PI* 65-67 as follows. Family concepts are to be contrasted with common feature concepts. For the latter, it is because of the common feature that each possesses that we call different things by the same word. For the former, it is because of different kinds of relations, and not because of a common feature, that we call different things by the same word. Whilst similarity is one valid type of such a qualifying relation, others might be mathematical, historical and so on. Those commentators who read Wittgenstein narrowly, and take overlapping resemblances or similarities *alone* to be the alternative to the common feature explanation, lack textual justification for their position.²⁰ In addition, the strong reading of the term ‘family’ is misleading and something of a red herring: despite the combining of ‘family’ and ‘resemblance’ in one phrase, it seems clear from his wider use of ‘family’ that Wittgenstein’s general purpose was not to imply a genetic or causal connection.

All of this, of course, does not deny that the extension of some concepts will be determined by genetic or causal factors, just as Wittgenstein and interpretation C do not deny that some concepts have common features present in each qualifying member. The concern here is, firstly, to demonstrate that concepts are not formed *necessarily* on the basis of common features; secondly, to maintain that similarity or resemblance is too narrow a notion to be the determinant of conceptual discrimination in family cases; and, thirdly, that although some concepts may be determined on the basis of genetic or causal connections, Wittgenstein’s use of the term ‘family’ was intended for a purpose that was orthogonal to this. As a result, concepts that fall under the term ‘family resemblance’ can be seen as a subset of ‘family

²⁰ It seems that one of the reasons which make commentators focus on the similarities is because Wittgenstein’s texts from the 1930’s mention only similarities, especially the influential text *The Blue Book*. It might be that Wittgenstein changed his mind and thinks of different kinds of relations later. However, this would require careful study of the development of his ideas, and is beyond the scope of this thesis.

concepts', neither implying any necessary genetic or causal connection.

Interpretation A and interpretation B can both now be seen to be too narrow, in their own different ways. Interpretation A's focus on similarities or resemblances is too restrictive and fails to take account of the other types of affinities and relations that Wittgenstein clearly had in mind. Interpretation B is predicated on a strong genetic or causal reading of the term 'family' that proves to be unwarranted when Wittgenstein's wider use of the terms is considered. For Wittgenstein, 'family' is to be applied more widely and generally without the causal implication. This allows interpretation C to meet both objection 2 and objection 3, as we saw earlier. This leaves us with the task of assessing how well interpretation C fares against objection 1.

1.2. [Objection 1 and interpretation C](#)

The essence of objection 1 was that discrimination on the basis of similarity or resemblance was insufficient because it is always possible to find similarities or resemblances between any two things: everything resembles everything else in some way. Consequently, if an activity is called a game because of the similarities it shares with some other activities called games, then, in virtue of everything resembling everything else in some way, it seems impossible to bar membership to any other activity, thereby rendering the term 'game' vacuous.

It should be said, of course, that interpretation C has already apparently limited the impact of objection 1 by denying the exclusive role of similarity in determining concept classification. However, proponents of this interpretation will be well aware that those pressing objection 1 may well turn their attention to the wider relations and affinities employed by Wittgenstein according to interpretation C and ask what it is that constrains the application of *these* relations, since

the same possibility of over-generation appears likely. For the sake of convenience I will focus on the issue as it applies to similarities, but both potential solutions examined below in 1.2.1 could apply equally easily to the wider notion of affinities etc.

In response to objection 1, a number of commentators argue that Wittgenstein was more sophisticated than the objection implies, having in mind only *salient* relevant similarities, rather than similarities *tout court*. Baker and Hacker, for instance, argue in this way: ‘Wittgenstein implies that the similarities among games justify calling them “games”, and that the absence of relevant similarities justifies refusing to call an activity “a game”.’ (Baker and Hacker, 2009, p. 215). In practice, they argue, ‘we do not accept any arbitrary resemblances as warranting the extension of the term’. (Baker and Hacker, 2009, p. 220). Gert reads Wittgenstein along similar lines: ‘[F]amily resemblances are those salient resemblances which are fairly common to, or distinctive of, the members of a kind.’²¹ (Gert, 1995, p. 183) If this were the case, objection 1 would be in serious trouble, its principal charge of lack of discrimination in determining similarity or resemblance being at odds with such claims.

However, there is a problem with relying on the notion of *relevant* similarities or resemblances, and it is that it seems merely to provoke

²¹ Gert thinks that the notion that shared properties are synonymous with resemblances has led interpreters to objection 1. But “resembles” shouldn’t be thought of as synonymous with “shares properties with”. The difference between shared properties and resemblances are, first, ‘not all properties contribute to resemblance.’ (Gert, 1995, p. 182). For example, properties such as the relational and negative properties: we don’t say that my apple and my computer resembles each other because they are both not a unicorn, or because they are both on my desk. The second difference is explained as follows, ‘if resemblance is merely a matter of sharing properties then degree of resemblance should depend on something like number or percentage of properties shared.’ However, according to him, this is not resemblance. He explains that we don’t count shared properties in order to determine whether two things resemble each other. Gert suggests that these two differences show us that shared properties are not synonymous with resemblances, and the confusion between the two things leads to the first objection, that everything resembles everything else.

a modification of objection 1. This says that even under the notion of relevant similarities, the extension of concepts to qualify will be too great. Take some of the relevant resemblances Wittgenstein mentions in *PI* 66. Winning and losing is apparently one of the relevant features for games, but winning and losing are common in battles and wars, in competitions for jobs, prizes and many other contests, and yet few of these we would classify, in our ordinary usage, as ‘games’.

The same difficulty, it seems, is also likely to arise when we encounter a new phenomenon. The issue here is that the phenomenon is likely to resemble more than one concept in some relevant way, and it is not clear how we should choose between them on the basis of relevant relevance or similarity alone.

1.2.1. Two solutions to modified objection 1

At the heart of the issue that the modifications to objection 1 address is the recognition that, absent some other factor, notions of similarity or resemblance (or other relations) appear to be insufficient to *explain* either the decisions concerning concept categorisations that we have made historically, or the basis on which we might go about making future such decisions in the face of new phenomena. Even the restrictions introduced by applying the notion of ‘*relevant*’ to similarities takes us little further forward in that it, crucially, provides no account of how relevance is determined.

In what follows I analyse two possible approaches to this difficulty. It is important to note that the focus in each is on identifying the principal factor that *causes* the particular decisions and not others to be made. The first approach ‘looks inside’ and places the responsibility on the psychological principles which guide us in the formation of concepts. I will call it ‘the psychological solution’. The second ‘looks outside’, and proposes that the determining factor consists in the shared interests

and purposes present in a community of the language speakers. I will call this ‘the form of life solution’.²²

‘The psychological solution’ is exemplified by Eleanor Rosch’s work²³. She writes, ‘Wittgenstein [in *PI* 67] says of family resemblance “look and see”, and ... I decided to look and see’ if there is a common feature or criss-crossing similarities between different things we call by the same word. (Rosch, 1987, p. 156). To do this, Rosch performed a number of experiments aimed at determining whether people categorise objects presented to them on the basis of common features or criss-crossing similarities. The findings support the view that, for some concepts, we do categorise the objects because of their criss-crossing similarities²⁴. This seems to provide empirical evidence for those who consider that the exclusive search for a common feature is misguided.

However, and more importantly for present purposes, she observes that ‘human categorization should not be considered the arbitrary product of historical accident or of whimsy but rather the result of psychological principles of categorization.’ (Rosch, 2004, p. 91). In other words, she directs the attention of those who would understand the principles by which objects are subsumed under concepts, and, in cases of similarity, the way in which relevant similarity is determined, to empirical psychological research. For her, the classification decisions we make are driven by, and manifestations of, underlying psychological principles. According to Rosch, these principles are likely to vary by concept: her research offers detailed hypotheses about

²² Note that both answers go beyond *PI* 65-67. The wording of these two passages is neutral to which answer is more compatible with the text.

²³ I focus here on her solution to modified objection 1, and not the details of her ‘prototype theory’.

²⁴ See Rosch (1975).

those principles that are relevant or salient for categorising objects as birds and furniture²⁵.

The second answer looks toward the community that we inhabit and suggests that it is because we share the same form of life, the same interests and needs, that we are likely to pick out the same relevant similarities in forming concepts. According to J.E. Bellaimy, ‘the concept... is shaped by an interaction between the features of the objects subsumed under the concept, and the needs and purposes of the users of the language’. (Bellaimy, 1990, p. 40). To explain his answer, he gives an example from Bambourgh’s article:

‘Let us suppose that trees are of great importance in the life and work of the South Sea of [imaginary] Islanders, and that they have a rich and highly developed language in which they speak of the trees with which the land there is thickly clad. But they do not have names for the species and genera of trees as they are recognized by our botanists. As we walk around the island... we can easily pick out orange-tress, date palms and cedars. Our hosts...surprise us by giving the same name to each of the trees in what is from our point of view a very mixed plantation. They point out to us what they called a mixed planation, and we see that it is in our terms a clump of trees of the same species... It may be that the islanders classify tress as ‘boat-building trees’, ‘house-building trees’, etc., and that they are more concerned with the height, thickness and maturity of the trees than they are with the distinction of species that interest us.’ (Bambourgh, 1960, pp. 220-221).

The salient resemblances in this example are the thickness, height and maturity of the trees. These salient resemblances are present in the objects which are subsumed under the concept on one hand, but the

²⁵ See Rosch (1975) and (1981).

fact that these particular resemblances are deemed salient is a consequence of the shared interests and purposes of the language speakers, by, in the example, the use of the trees in house-building and boat-building...etc. It might be that for house-building trees we need height and thickness but not maturity; for boat-building, the maturity and the thickness is more relevant but not the height, and so on. The salient resemblances are justified by the interaction between the features of the things and the needs and purposes of the speakers.²⁶ This explains how some resemblances become relevant in forming family concepts.²⁷

Gert holds a similar view, in as much as he thinks that children learn from their environment how to pick up the relevant similarities for family resemblance concepts, and that 'we will only succeed in teaching the child this grouping if he already experiences the world in much the same way we do.' (Gert, 1995, p. 184). In other words, the idea that 'all those who share a language must be capable of recognizing the same family resemblances is one of the points Wittgenstein makes when he talks about forms of life.' (Gert, 1995, p. 184). We share the same form of life, and this is why we pick those similarities as relevant, and not others.²⁸

Each of these two answers recognises that we need an extra factor in order to explain how it is that we determine that particular resemblances or similarities are relevant to the classification of

²⁶ Note that Bambourgh doesn't address the objection directly. He was trying to explain what he takes Wittgenstein's 'family resemblance' to be. However, as Bellaimy explains, Bambourgh's reading of family resemblance seems to meet the objection by appealing to the interests and needs of the speakers.

²⁷ This, in turn, explains how our classification of the trees is different from the islanders' because we have two different forms of life.

²⁸ Let me be clear here that there are different interpretations to what Wittgenstein means by 'form of life'. I only focus on the answer given to objection 1, and how those commentators think of it as part of Wittgenstein's appeal to the shared form of life of the linguistic community.

particular phenomena. Whilst Rosch identifies psychological principles as the key determinant, she doesn't rule out the influence of the purposes and needs of humans in determining which similarities are relevant: 'One influence on how attributes will be defined by humans is clearly the category system already existent in the culture at a given time.' (Rosch, 2004, p. 93). However, it is, of course, open to her to claim that even the form of life present in a culture itself derives from the psychological principles of its members. In addition, although Rosch is clearly animated by Wittgenstein, she does not set out in any way to interpret his text. By contrast, proponents of the 'form of life' hypothesis generally seek to justify their position on the basis of Wittgenstein's writing.

I do not intend to arbitrate between these two options here, but both seem potentially to provide the resources that interpretation C needs to counter objection 1 by explaining how the discriminations between relevant and irrelevant similarities or other relational factors might be made. As a result of this and the previous findings, it seems as though interpretation C will be able to answer all three initial objections, and is therefore to be preferred over both interpretation A and interpretation B.

This allows us to consider the original question concerning Wittgenstein's answer to the unity question, 'do we (always) call different things by the same word because of a common feature?' Interpretation C answers this question in the negative. Whilst Wittgenstein does not deny the existence of common feature concepts, he is nevertheless keen to emphasise that, for some concepts, rather than concept individuation being based on the possession of features that all examples share, we instead call different things by the same word because of different kinds of relations and affinities between members of the concept family. Interpretation C also makes it clear that exclusive focus on the role of similarities omits key aspects of concept formation. Instead, it proposes that similarity, although

important, be regarded only as one of a number of potential relations, along with mathematical relations, historical connections, and so on. Interpretation C also clarifies the potential confusion caused by Wittgenstein's own term 'family resemblance'. It regards focus on the genetic or causal implications of the term 'family' as potentially misleading, and favours instead the view that 'family resemblance' simply indicates a grouping formed in virtue of resemblance or similarity between members. On this reading, 'family resemblance' concepts are a subset of 'family concepts', the latter also including other groupings or families based on properties other than resemblance.

Before concluding this chapter, however, I should clarify an important distinction which is often misunderstood in the secondary literature. This concerns the relationship between 'family concepts' and 'open concepts'. My claim will be that conflation of the two misunderstands Wittgenstein's text and represents a potential impediment to understanding Wittgenstein's answer to the unity question.

2. Family concepts and Open concepts

Many commentators agree that Wittgenstein discusses the unity question in *PI* 65-80, and that he proposes that the notion of family resemblance should replace the search for common features in concepts (for example, Baker and Hacker (2005) and (2009)). In doing so, they describe these sections as the 'chapter on family resemblance'. However, they also tend to associate 'family concepts' with what I will call 'open concepts', and I will argue that this is potentially misleading. On the face of it, it seems as though commentators follow this route because Wittgenstein cites the same examples in discussing both 'family resemblance concepts' and 'open concepts' in *PI* 65-80.

Wittgenstein discusses the assumption that every word must be bounded by sharp boundaries once and for all in a number of different

places in the *PI*. For example, in *PI* 92, Wittgenstein writes, ‘We ask: “What is language?”, “What is a proposition?” And the answer to these questions is to be given once for all; and independently of any future experience.’ The assumption that Wittgenstein identifies here is that answers to ‘what is X’ questions are to be determined once and for all, independent of any future experience, resulting in some kind of universal, timeless definition.

Wittgenstein takes Gotlob Frege to require such a definition for ‘what is’ questions. In *PI* 71, he writes, ‘Frege compares a concept to an area and says that an area with vague boundaries cannot be called an area at all’. Frege explains, ‘A definition of a concept ... must be complete; it must unambiguously determine, as regards any object, whether or not it falls under the concept... Thus there must not be any object as regards which the definition leaves in doubt whether it falls under the concept... the concept must have a sharp boundary... a concept that is not sharply defined is wrongly termed a concept.’²⁹ (Frege, 1960, p. 159). I will call such definitions ‘universal’.

In response, Wittgenstein argues that there might be concepts in OL which leave the boundaries open; I will call these ‘open concepts’. He suggests that not all definitions in OL need to be universal. For a definition to be universal, i.e. applicable to all possible cases, it must be applicable to cases which we haven’t faced yet, including novel or unpredictable situations. He offers an example:

‘I say, “There is a chair”. What if I go up to it, meaning to fetch it, and it suddenly disappears from sight?——“So it wasn’t a chair, but some kind of illusion”.——But in a few moments we see it again and are

²⁹ Frege gives the following example, ‘[H]as the question ‘Are we still Christians?’ really got a sense, if it is indeterminate whom the predicate ‘Christians’ can truly be ascribed to, and who must be refused it?’ He requires sharp boundaries around the concept in order to define it. If we don’t draw these sharp boundaries, then we don’t know what we are talking about.

able to touch it and so on.—"So the chair was there after all and its disappearance was some kind of illusion".—But suppose that after a time it disappears again—or seems to disappear. What are we to say now? Have you rules ready for such cases—rules saying whether one may use the word "chair" to include this kind of thing?' (*PI* 80).

Other ordinary language philosophers make a similar point. Here is an example from Austin which will be examined later in the thesis: 'Suppose I was asked if the bird which I see is a goldfinch, and I say "I am sure it is a real goldfinch", and then it does something outrageous, like explodes or quotes Mrs. Woolf... [In such a case] *we don't know what to say*'.³⁰ (Austin, 1979, p. 88).

Wittgenstein's primary purpose is not to focus the discussion on whether something should or should not be considered a chair (or a goldfinch, in the Austin case). The issue is that in situations such as these I don't know how to decide whether the disappearing/reappearing chair is a chair, or whether a Woolf-quoting goldfinch is a goldfinch or not. There are no rules to tell us what to say in such circumstances. This is precisely the dilemma we will face on occasion in ordinary language when we are presented by novel cases which invite us to decide whether or not we want to extend a concept to include the case at hand. Wittgenstein's claim is that for some concepts in OL the boundaries are open, and we cannot tell whether or not a new phenomenon should be subsumed under the concept as it stands; a decision needs to be made.

³⁰ There are many similar examples given by Wittgenstein, Austin and Frederick Waismann in different places. Waismann terms those concepts 'open texture' concepts in his paper 'Verifiability', see Waismann (1968.) The discussions on open concepts in the literature usually refer to that paper. Wittgenstein presents two cases using the word 'personality' in *The Blue Book*. See Wittgenstein 1958, pp. 62-63. The three philosophers give almost the same account of open concepts, and for the same reason: to point out that there are no sharp boundaries in OL.

Closed concepts were supposed to tell us, for all possible applications, whether or not any given phenomenon could be subsumed under the concept, but it seems that in such cases the certainty inherent in the application of closed concepts cannot necessarily be brought to bear on the problem. According to Wittgenstein, open concepts are necessary because novel situations or phenomena may require the boundaries of application to be left open in order to accommodate their new features. As a result, the presumption that concepts need to be defined universally appears not to be warranted.³¹

In the secondary literature, commentators tend to associate family resemblance concepts with open concepts to a greater or lesser extent. Richard J. Scalfani takes one of the strongest lines, stating that there ‘is a strong indication that... the approximate equivalent of “open-textured concept” [open concept] for Wittgenstein is “family-resemblance concept”.’ (Scalfani, 1971, p. 340). Baker and Hacker write that ‘Wittgenstein asserts that family-resemblance concepts have no sharp boundaries.’ (Baker and Hacker, 2009, p. 216). Sluga explains that, according to Wittgenstein, ‘family resemblance terms are typically open ended.’ (Sluga, 2006, p. 6).

So far as Wittgenstein’s position is concerned, my claim is that in the two main passages which address open concepts, there are only two relatively humble claims: in *PI* 68 Wittgenstein simply states that some family concepts are open concepts, nothing more, and in *PI* 80, he states that ‘chair’ is an open concept; there is no reference to family concepts or to common feature concepts. If this is correct, there seems little justification for the stronger readings present in Baker and Hacker and Scalfani in particular.

³¹ It is important to distinguish between vague concepts, concepts with borderline cases, and open concepts. For a useful discussion on this point, see Baker and Hacker, 2009, p. 216 and 2005, p. 157. The focus here is on open concepts.

PI 68 starts with family concepts and moves to drawing sharp boundaries. Here is *PI* 68-a:

“All right: the concept of number is defined for you as the logical sum of these individual interrelated concepts: cardinal numbers, rational numbers, real numbers, etc.; and in the same way the concept of a game as the logical sum of a corresponding set of sub-concepts.’

The interlocutor accepts that there is no one common feature, but different kinds of relation in virtue of which we call different things by the same word, for some concepts such as ‘game’ and ‘number’. However, he rephrases Wittgenstein’s suggestion as a closed list of sub-concepts. Crucially, Wittgenstein objects to this rephrasing.

‘It need not be so. For I *can* give the concept 'number' rigid limits in this way, that is, use the word "number" for a rigidly limited concept, but I can also use it so that the extension of the concept is *not* closed by a frontier. And this is how we do use the word "game".’(*PI* 68)

According to Wittgenstein, if a concept is defined as a closed list of sub-concepts, then it has sharp boundaries and it is not extendable. Since it includes only these sub-concepts, no new phenomenon can be added to it. However in OL, the concepts discussed, ‘number’ and ‘game’, don’t have sharp boundaries. The conclusion is then the following: Don’t rephrase the notion of family concept as a closed list of sub-concepts, because this rephrasing would make it into a closed concept. The discussed concepts are not closed concepts, they are open.

I suggest that Wittgenstein’s purpose is not to show that family concepts are identical with open concepts, or that common feature concepts are not open concepts. His objection in *PI* 68 is very specific: it is on the rephrasing of the notion of family concept as a closed list. If you understand a family concept as a closed list, then you treat it as

a closed concept. This need not be the case: some family concepts are open concepts in OL.

Again, if we look at the other example of open concepts in *PI* 80, which we discussed above, it seems that the moral of the imaginary case of the chair is that we can't tell if we would use the word 'chair' in that case. The concept is not regulated by rules for all the possible applications. However, there is no indication that chair is, or must be, a family resemblance concept. There is no reference at all to either family or common feature concepts in *PI* 80.

So far as the issue of the unity problem is concerned, it also seems that both family concepts and common feature concepts can be 'open concepts'. This is important because the association between 'family concepts' and 'open concepts' might incline investigators to think that the establishment of a particular concept as an 'open concept' will entail that it is also a 'family concept'. However, this move is not warranted. A 'common feature concept' can accommodate novelty at least some of the time³², and therefore may also be regarded on occasion as an 'open concept'. Equally, the fact that a particular concept is a family concept, does not necessarily mean that it will be easier to decide whether new phenomena fall under that concept or not. The issue of 'open concepts' is orthogonal to the unity problem, and associating 'family concepts' with 'open concepts' distorts the distinction between 'common feature concepts' and 'family concepts'.

³² For example, M. Mandelbaum argues that photography was subsumed under the term 'art', precisely because 'art' is a common feature concept, and photography possessed the qualifying features. See Mandelbaum (1994). His article is a reply to M. Weitz (1994) influential article which argues that 'art' is a family concept because it is an open concept.

3. Conclusions

In this chapter I examined Wittgenstein's answers to the unity question i.e. do we use the same word in different cases because the cases have something in common? We have seen that Wittgenstein proposes that for some concepts there need not be such a defining common feature, but there might be different kinds of relations and affinities. We term these concepts 'family concepts' in contrast to 'common feature concepts'.

In section 1, I examined three interpretations, and suggested that Interpretation C is closer to the text, and better resists the objections raised, than Interpretations A and B. Interpretation C answers the unity question in the negative. Whilst Wittgenstein does not deny the existence of common feature concepts, he makes it clear that for some concepts the possession of features that all examples share will not be the determinant of whether phenomena fall under that concept or not. Instead, he shows that we call different things by the same word because of different kinds of relations and affinities between members of the concept's family. This interpretation also denies the exclusive role of similarities in determining qualifying members, and argues such a narrow reading is likely to distort interpretation of Wittgenstein's overall perspective on concept attribution. Instead, it proposes that similarity should be regarded as one of a number of potential relations, the others including mathematical relations, historical connections, and so on.

Interpretation C also clarifies the potential confusion caused by Wittgenstein's own term 'family resemblance'. It regards focus on the genetic or causal implications of the term 'family' as potentially misleading, preferring instead the view that 'family resemblance' simply indicates a grouping formed in virtue of resemblance or similarity between members. On this reading, 'family resemblance' concepts are a subset of 'family concepts'. The former restricts

qualification as members of the family to resemblance or similarity, whereas the latter, whilst allowing similarity, also includes other groupings or families based on relations or affinities other than resemblance.

Interpretation C also recognises that, if it is to *explain* the way in which we have avoided the potential problem of over classifications raised by objection 1 (rather than merely assert that history shows we have done so), then some account of the way in which we seem able to discriminate between relevant and irrelevant relations must be offered. I discussed two possible theories but did not adjudicate between them.

The result of these findings is that interpretation C seems best placed to meet the objections raised against interpretation A and interpretation B.

Finally, I clarified the relationship between open concepts and family resemblance concepts, showing that one was not synonymous with the other and that even a weaker association between the two could be seriously misleading, particularly in the context of the unity problem where the distinction between ‘common feature concepts’ and ‘family concepts’ was critical.

In chapter 1 I claimed that prominent ordinary language philosophy interpreters tend to view Wittgenstein’s work within the framework of the compatibility problem. I argued that such an approach, particularly if applied exclusively, risked misinterpreting Wittgenstein’s position on crucial issues, as well as potentially ignoring important lines in his thought. Instead, I proposed that key passages in his work should be seen as answering the unity problem, and, in the next chapter, I will focus on one of the central discussions in *PI*, that of ‘understanding’, and seek to show that it is better viewed through the lens of the unity problem rather than that of the compatibility problem.

Chapter 3

Examples from Wittgenstein

Introduction

In seeking to understand Wittgenstein's answer to the unity problem (i.e., 'do we use the same word in different cases because of a common feature?'), I said that I would divide my analysis into two chapters. In the previous chapter, I examined Wittgenstein's answer as it appears principally in *PI* 65-67. There we saw that Wittgenstein's response to the interlocutor's claim, that there must be something in common between all the cases we call X, is that for some concepts it is the presence of different kinds of relations and affinities, rather than any common feature, which is the determinant. We termed such concepts 'family concepts' in contrast to 'common feature concepts'.

In this chapter, I examine Wittgenstein's answer to the unity problem as it appears in the context of specific philosophical problems examined in the *PI*. I will focus in particular on his discussions of 'reading' and 'understanding', and in doing so aim to accomplish two things.

My first aim is to demonstrate the importance of the unity problem and its centrality for Wittgenstein by showing that it is tackled in some key passages in the *PI*. The in-depth analysis of these examples will, I hope, add a practical perspective to the more 'theoretical' discussion of the problem that took place in the previous chapter. My claim is that Wittgenstein wants to show that the assumption that there must be a common feature for these concepts in OL is not justified, and that he achieves this in practice by deploying both a negative and a positive approach. The negative method typically shows that proposed common features do not work in all cases, whereas the positive method

shows how such concepts need not possess common features and could instead be family concepts.

My second aim is to show that Wittgenstein's discussions on these concepts do not fit well into the model presumed by the compatibility problem. This is important because, as I observed in the first chapter, my claim is that the compatibility problem, which focuses on cases where philosophers say something which we would not say in OL, is often not the best lens through which to view Wittgenstein's work. In the specific passages that I will examine, it seems that Wittgenstein thinks that what philosophers say *is* compatible with OL, but they are led into philosophical trouble explicitly because they look for a common feature in all uses.

The reader will note that in what follows the terms 'family resemblance concepts' and 'family concepts' are used interchangeably, despite my having established a clear distinction between the two in the previous chapter. This is because the key comparison for present purposes is that between common feature concepts and the broad notion of family concepts (which have no necessary common feature), of which family resemblance concepts are a subset.

Wittgenstein's treatment of 'reading' appears as a set of passages in its own right within his wider treatment of 'understanding'. However, as we will see, the morals from 'reading' are intended to carry through into the discussion on 'understanding', and play a crucial and explicit foundational part in Wittgenstein's complex position on 'understanding'. I therefore start my analysis by examining his treatment of 'reading'.

1. 'Reading'

Wittgenstein discusses whether the word 'reading' has one common feature which defines the concept in all its uses. At the start, though, he explicitly restricts the scope of activities that will count as 'reading' in his investigation: '[F]irst I need to remark that I am not counting the understanding of what is read as part of 'reading' for purposes of this investigation: reading is here the activity of rendering out loud what is written or printed; and also of writing from dictation, writing out something printed, playing from a score, and so on' (*PI* 156). The question posed is whether we call these different activities by the word 'reading' because of some common feature.³³

The typical pattern of exchange between Wittgenstein and his interlocutor on 'reading' goes as follows. The interlocutor proposes one definition after another which is supposed to capture the defining common feature, and Wittgenstein discusses each of them in turn. In each case he agrees that under certain circumstances the definition of 'reading' that the interlocutor proposes works, but then gives a counterexample where we use the word 'reading' in a way which doesn't fit with the interlocutor's proposed definition. This I characterise as Wittgenstein's negative approach, which is to be complemented by his positive approach in which he suggests that 'reading' is a family concept, and not a common feature concept.³⁴ The two sides, as we shall see, are interrelated.

³³ The example is atypical. One might ask why Wittgenstein does not count the understanding of what is read as part of 'reading'. It seems that the reason is that there is another deep connection between the discussion on 'reading' and the discussion on 'understanding', which is supposed to be revealed by this condition. However, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss such connection. I confine myself to discussing on the common feature.

³⁴ Wittgenstein gives 'what is in common' a sense of 'feature' or 'characteristic' or something akin to these terms. In what follows, he uses 'characteristic' in *PI* 154, 'criterion' in *PI* 159, 'definition' in *PI* 162, and 'meaning' in *PI* 164, when he discusses whether there is something in common between all the cases of 'reading'.

In section 1.1, I focus on the negative side before dealing with the positive side in 1.2. This lays the ground for, in 1.3, assessing whether Wittgenstein's work on 'reading' fits better with the unity problem than with the compatibility problem.

1.1. Two definitions of 'reading' – the negative approach

The first common feature definition offered by the interlocutor runs as follows: 'the one real criterion for anybody's *reading* is the conscious act of reading,' (*PI* 159). This definition suggests that a reader will always know that he is reading, and that he thus experiences different kinds of feelings to the person who is pretending to be reading. Those feelings are the 'one real criterion'. Wittgenstein gives an example in *PI* 159 to support this definition in which he focuses our attention on the feelings of a man apparently reading.

A man 'learns a Russian sentence by heart and says it while looking at the printed words as if he were reading them.' Wittgenstein continues, 'there are ... many more or less characteristic sensations in reading a printed sentence... [Such as] sensations of hesitating, of looking closer, of misreading, of words following on one another more or less smoothly, and so on.' Equally, though, there are 'characteristic sensations in reciting something one has learnt by heart', and in this example the man knows that he is pretending to read and also knows that he doesn't have the characteristic feelings of reading, possessing instead the characteristic feeling of reciting by heart. In this thought experiment it appears as though the proposed criterion/definition works: reference to how the act feels seems to be the criterion by which we are able to distinguish between reading and reciting.

However, in *PI* 160 Wittgenstein gives us two counterexamples to show that the first proposed definition will not work in all circumstances. The first is the following: 'We give someone who can read fluently a text that he never saw before. He reads it to us—but

with the sensation of saying something he has learnt by heart (this might be the effect of some drug).’ In this case, the reader doesn’t have the characteristic feelings of reading we mentioned above, having instead the feeling of reciting by heart. Now, if it is the *feeling* that is the key criterion in determining whether his activity is to be described as reading or not, it seems as though we should say that he is not reading. However, this seems to run against our normal judgements about reading.

The second example appears to demonstrate the opposite, describing a man who has the characteristic feelings of reading, but whom we would not normally take to be reading:

Suppose that a man who is under the influence of a certain drug is presented with a series of characters (which need not belong to any existing alphabet), he utters words corresponding to the number of the characters, as if they were letters, and does so with all the outward signs, and with the sensations, of reading. (We have experiences like this in dreams; after waking up in such a case one says perhaps: "It seemed to me as if I were reading a script, though it was not reading at all.")

In this case, the man has the required characteristic feelings of reading, but it is not clear that we would normally count him as reading.³⁵

Wittgenstein’s method here is to offer the reader an example that appears to confirm the initial common feature definition, but then to demonstrate through two counter-examples that this finding is not generalisable to all instances of reading. The implication is that the

³⁵ Wittgenstein asks in the first counterexample whether the man is reading or not, but doesn’t give an answer. For the second, however, he does answer: ‘In such a case some people would be inclined to say the man was *reading* those marks. Others, that he was not.’

attraction of searching for and employing a common feature is misleading, and that such features will not bear the weight that will be placed on them if they are to be the defining criterion of a common feature definition.

Wittgenstein then turns to his second definition. The initial claim here is that when I read an English word there is something distinctive about the spoken words: “[w]hat does the characteristic thing about the experience of reading consist in?—Here I should like to say: “The words that I utter *come* in a special way”” (*PI* 165). To make this clear, compare the way you read the letter A with what happens when you are presented with an arbitrary mark. Wittgenstein invites us to notice how familiar the utterance of the letter A is, and how unfamiliar that of the arbitrary mark feels (*PI* 166). The claim is that it is this distinctive familiarity that distinguishes reading from not-reading: the familiarity marks the experience of reading.

However, in a similar pattern to his treatment of the first definition, Wittgenstein, in *PI* 167-168, invites us to question the universal applicability of this kind of familiarity to cases of reading. He therefore gives us two examples of reading where there is no such familiarity. He asks us to think of Morse code (*PI* 167), or reading a text printed entirely in capital letters (*PI* 168). In these cases, we are reading but we don’t seem to experience the familiarity which is supposed to mark every case of reading. As a result it seems clear that the proposed definition doesn’t work.

The lesson from these two negative examples is that it is extremely difficult to isolate features that will be present in every case of reading. Whilst such an approach seems to be intuitively attractive, is also the case that relatively easy to come up with examples that argue against any particular chosen common feature. As a result, the reader is invited to share Wittgenstein’s negative conclusion about recourse to common features, at least in the case of reading. This is not to say that the

proposed criteria are wrong in all cases – quite clearly they are not. The key point is that they are not correct in all cases, which they would need to be in order to qualify as common features.

1.2. 'Reading' as a family concept – the positive approach

In the previous chapter we have seen that, according to Wittgenstein, we might use the same word in different cases in virtue of different kinds of relations and affinities between them, not because of a single common feature. I called these concepts 'family concepts', in contrast to 'common feature concepts'. In the context of 'reading', Wittgenstein writes: '[B]ut what in all this is essential to reading as such? Not any one feature that occurs in all cases of reading' (*PI* 168). There is no single common feature which defines the concept, and instead of looking for such an element, he suggests that we 'use the word "read" for a family of cases. And in different circumstances we apply different criteria for a person's reading' (*PI* 164). Wittgenstein thus takes 'reading' to be a family concept in virtue of which there are different kinds of relations which justify our use of the word 'reading' in different cases.

What I suggest is notable about his method in his treatment of 'reading' is that the positive and the negative sides are interrelated, and the combination of the two represents one of his approaches to the unity problem. The positive side is built on the work of the negative side, and is in fact a continuation of it. The negative side is the first part in which the interlocutor is looking for a defining common feature, and gives one proposed definition after another. In response, for each proposed common feature, Wittgenstein tries to show that it is unlikely to work for all cases, casting doubt on the possibility of uncovering a defining common feature. However, in exposing the deficiencies of the common feature approach, Wittgenstein shows that there are different features which appear in some cases but not in all, and this provides the platform for his positive claim that these features

constitute a family. In that sense, we see that the word is a family concept, and not a common feature concept³⁶.

The importance of these passages is that they show how Wittgenstein treats the common feature question in a concrete example. In addition, they shed light on the discussion on ‘understanding’, which is one of the most vital discussions in *PI*. My claim is that Wittgenstein inserts the passages on ‘reading’ into the middle of his discussion on ‘understanding’ because he wants to use the finding that there need not be one common feature for ‘reading’ to prepare the reader for the conclusion that ‘understanding’, too, need not have one common feature. This is one of the reasons I will return to my examination of his work on ‘reading’ when discussing Wittgenstein’s treatment of ‘understanding’.

There are, however, a number of prominent interpreters who, despite the evidence adduced above, read these passages as an example of Wittgenstein’s work on the compatibility problem rather than the unity problem. In the next section I will examine whether their approach is warranted.

1.3. ‘Reading’ and compatibility problem

I pointed out in the first chapter that the main problem which OLP interpreters focus on is the compatibility problem, and that they tend to present Wittgenstein’s work as being mainly concerned with this problem. This problem arises when philosophers violate the rules of OL, when philosophers use language in a way that is incompatible with how we use it ordinarily. My intention here is to demonstrate that Wittgenstein’s work on ‘reading’, and later on ‘understanding’, does

³⁶ A very similar discussion is to be found on ‘being guided’ in *PI* 172-178. Wittgenstein argues there that ‘being guided’ is a family concept.

not fit comfortably with this approach and should rather be viewed through the lens of the unity problem, as presented above.

The most detailed, and perhaps the most prominent, presentation of Wittgenstein's treatment of 'reading' from the point of view of the compatibility problem is to be found in Peter Hacker's commentary. Hacker's conclusion on the discussion of 'reading' summarises his position nicely: 'Being able to read is an ability, not a mental state or reservoir, from which the overt performance flows. Reading is the exercise of that ability; it is something defined not by inner processes, but rather by the public criteria in the various circumstances, that justify application of the term.' (Baker and Hacker, 2005, p. 309). According to Hacker, Wittgenstein's main aim is to show that philosophers violate the rules of OL, by taking 'reading' to be an inner process or state or experience. They should, instead, pay attention to the way in which ordinary language treats the word: were they to do so they would see clearly that 'reading' is an ability.³⁷

As we shall see, in arguing for this conclusion Hacker states that for Wittgenstein inner processes or inner experiences are neither necessary nor sufficient for 'reading', although they might accompany 'reading'. I disagree with this reading. I find that close examination of Wittgenstein's text reveals that inner processes or experiences can be constitutive of reading in virtue of qualifying as one of the different features which constitute the family. This last point is key to my disagreement with Hacker. Both I and Hacker allow that 'reading' might be a family concept, but we differ over whether inner processes are included in the family or not. Hacker thinks they should not be,

³⁷ A similar reading for these passages on 'reading' is suggested by Glock and R. Fogelin. According to Glock: 'Reading is the exercise of an ability, not the manifestation of mechanism, mental or biological'. (Glock, 1996, p. 374). Fogelin gives a similar reading. See Fogelin, 1987, pp. 147-154. However, it is only in Hacker's detailed commentary that we find the view explained fully. I will discuss Glock's and Fogelin's views on 'understanding' below.

whereas I read Wittgenstein as allowing them to be members, although, of course, membership does not equate with being necessary features. This difference is best explained in the context of our differing readings of the two definitions we examined above.

Recall the first definition: ‘the one real criterion for anybody's *reading* is the conscious act of reading,’ (*PI* 159). Hacker comments on *PI* 159-160 as follows:

‘The experiences that accompany reading (or the experience of thinking one is reading) are neither necessary nor sufficient for reading. They are not criteria for reading, and their absence is not a criterion for not reading.’ (Baker and Hacker, 2005, pp. 336-337).

A similar treatment is offered for the second definition, in which the words we are reading are said to come to us in a distinctive way, with a feeling of familiarity, for example. Commenting on the second definition, Hacker writes that *PI* 165 discusses:

‘[T]he thought that reading is a particular process, a special conscious activity of the mind. The words one reads ... *come* in a special way ... But again, no *experiences* of the way they come are either individually necessary, or jointly or disjunctively sufficient for reading. The fiction of the special way the words come, and the idea that reading is a quite particular but elusive process, are examined in §§165–8.’ (Baker and Hacker, 2005, p. 309).

Hacker takes the passages to show that the proposed definitions don't work. Inner processes or inner experiences are neither necessary nor sufficient for ‘reading’; however, they might accompany ‘reading’. In

that sense, Hacker concludes that 'reading' is not an inner process or a set of inner experiences.

We said that Hacker recognizes that one of Wittgenstein's aims in discussing 'reading' is to show that it is not a common feature concept but is instead a family concept, and, in his commentary on *PI* 164, he states that 'reading' is indeed such a concept. (Baker and Hacker, 2005, p. 339). However, he doesn't relate this finding to his discussion of the two definitions above in a way that I think is satisfactory. His conclusion that 'reading' is not an inner process or a set of inner experiences is too strong.

My position is that Wittgenstein should not be read so strongly because he is not trying to establish that the type of feelings discussed can *never* be qualifying features for reading. Rather than seeking to establish either necessary or sufficient conditions for reading he is, in his initial negative approach, instead merely seeking to show that what we had thought might be a necessary condition proves on examination to be no such thing. His negative approach, then, is intent on destabilising preconceptions regarding the essential nature of reading, using ordinary language to demonstrate that these do not hold water.

And whilst Wittgenstein, as we saw earlier, also has a positive method which he applies to the problem, it again does not seem to be the sort that provides the evidence that Hacker needs to sustain his position. Thus, Wittgenstein does not question, in his negative phase, a particular claim concerning the necessary and sufficient conditions for reading in order, in his positive phase, to come up with one of his own. Instead, his negative purpose is to show that the particular necessary and sufficient definition offered does not work (and, by implication, to suggest that we should question generally whether such a definition is likely to work), and his positive aim is to encourage us to view 'reading' as a family concept, a type of concept which, by its nature (examined in the previous chapter), seems opposed to ruling out

particular features as being incapable of being the qualifying features, at least under specific circumstances.

Viewed in this way, my conclusion is that Wittgenstein's text and method argue against Hacker's strong conclusion that the purpose of the passages is to show that the experiences or feelings that on occasion accompany reading can never be features of 'reading'. It seems to me far more plausible to take Wittgenstein as saying that each of the features in the two proposed definitions cannot constitute a common feature of reading, but that they may be part of the family of defining features.³⁸

Part of the reason that Hacker, in my view, takes such a strong reading of Wittgenstein is that he automatically views Wittgenstein's text through the compatibility problem lens. In looking to find incompatibilities between the philosopher's use of language and the way in which ordinary language actually works he is, I think, predisposed to rule in or rule out in general, and this, perhaps, leads him to read Wittgenstein, too, as 'ruling out' inner processes or feelings in the context of considering reading. However, I hope it is clear from the discussion above that this is unlikely to be Wittgenstein's purpose. His approach is more subtle and suggestive, his aims principally being to cast doubt on the idea that reading is a common feature concept and suggests that it is, instead, a family concept. Looking at his work through the lens of the unity problem makes it much easier to appreciate this subtlety, and makes it far more difficult to make the mistake (and I think it is a mistake) that Hacker does in his reading. This, for me, demonstrates why the presumption that Wittgenstein's text should be viewed through the lens of the compatibility problem is dangerous: it predisposes commentators to

³⁸ As for Hacker's conclusion that 'reading' is akin to an ability to do something, it doesn't seem that Wittgenstein explicitly says that 'reading' is the exercise of an ability in *PI* 156-178. However, I will address this below in relation to 'understanding'.

make judgements on Wittgenstein's behalf that are, on occasion, too strong.

I said earlier that, in many ways, Wittgenstein's discussion of 'reading' lays the groundwork for his treatment of 'understanding', and it is to this topic that I turn next.

2. 'Understanding'

In this section I examine Wittgenstein's discussion on 'understanding', principally in *PI* 151-154 and *PI* 179-183. The pattern of the discussion that follows, and many of its conclusions, largely mirrors what we saw earlier in the context of 'reading'. One of the key questions discussed here is again the common feature question, whether there is one common thing in virtue of which we call different things by the same word 'understanding', and, as with 'reading' above, I will claim that Wittgenstein's answer to this question is in the negative.

The particular common feature investigated here is that of 'understanding' being defined by a mental process. I will argue, in 2.1, that Wittgenstein shows that the definition may work in some cases, but not in all, defeating any ambitions we might have to make mental processes a common for 'understanding'. Instead, I take Wittgenstein to suggest that mental processes can be part of the family of defining features, and that the concept is better understood as a 'family concept'.

In 2.2, I examine alternative readings and conclude that they are flawed, not least because of the presumption by some of the interpreters that the compatibility problem represents the best framework through which to interpret Wittgenstein's work on 'understanding'. I will argue again that Wittgenstein's discussion is

better framed by the context of the unity problem, and that my conclusions from 2.1 stand.

In the last section, 2.3, I examine some of the implications of ‘understanding’ being a ‘family concept’, looking in this context at the claims that it is an ability rather than a mental process. I conclude that this analysis demonstrates again the potentially distorting role that ignoring the importance of the unity problem in these passages can play.

2.1. ‘Understanding’ – Wittgenstein’s position

What we shall see is a similar approach to the one we have seen with ‘reading’. Wittgenstein agrees that under certain circumstances the definition the interlocutor proposes works, but then gives a counterexample where we use the word ‘understanding’ in a way which doesn’t fit with the interlocutor’s proposed definition. This is Wittgenstein’s negative approach, which is to be complemented by his positive approach in which he suggests that ‘understanding’ is a family concept.

In *PI* 151 Wittgenstein introduces the problem; the problem is that philosophers take mental processes to be the common feature which defines ‘understanding’. For example, it seems that in a case of sudden understanding, a specific mental process happens in a flash; this constitutes understanding, and is reported by the exclamation ‘Now I understand’. Wittgenstein gives the following example: ‘A writes [a] series of numbers down; B watches him and tries to find a law for the sequence of numbers. If he succeeds he exclaims: “Now I can go on!”’ (*PI* 151). When someone understands the formula suddenly, in a flash, he exclaims ‘Now I understand’. The understanding of the formula is reported by the exclamation. ‘This capacity, this understanding, is something that makes its appearance in a moment’ (*PI* 151). In sudden cases of understanding, therefore, it seems that ‘understanding’ is a

specific mental process, such as the recognition of the formula in the case above.

However, the key question is whether this mental process, the occurring of the formula, represents the defining feature common to all the cases of understanding how to continue the series successfully, and the answer to this question is negative, as Wittgenstein now shows.³⁹

In *PI* 155, Wittgenstein explains, ‘when he [B above] suddenly knew how to go on, when he understood the principle, then possibly he had a special experience [the occurring of the formula]’. It seems as if this special experience is the defining common feature which justifies B in saying that he understands, that he can go on. However, Wittgenstein continues: ‘for us it is *the circumstances* under which he had such an experience that justify him in saying in such a case that he understands, that he knows how to go on.’

It therefore seems that we have two different views: the view that the occurring of the formula is the defining common feature for understanding the series, and the view that it is the specific circumstances under which the occurring of the formula occurred that justify B’s saying that he understands. To help to explain the differences between these two views, and what is meant by the circumstances which justify the claim of ‘understanding’, Wittgenstein then introduces the discussion on ‘reading’, stating explicitly, in *PI* 156, that ‘[T]his will become clearer if we interpolate the consideration of another word, namely "reading".’ And the clear message from my earlier interpretation of the discussion of ‘reading’ is that if ‘understanding’ turns out to operate in a similar manner to ‘reading’, then the search for a common feature in all cases of

³⁹ *PI* 152-154 discuss the issue from a different angle: looking for a hidden mental process. We don’t need to discuss this here.

‘understanding’ will not succeed, and that ‘understanding’ will turn out to be a family concept. I will revisit this issue shortly when I examine other prominent interpretations of both concepts.

When Wittgenstein returns to his discussion on ‘understanding’ in *PI* 179, he again uses the method we have seen him employ above in ‘reading’, and for the same purposes. Wittgenstein examines the proposed common feature: the occurring of the formula in B’s mind. The question for Wittgenstein is, does someone who exclaims ‘Now I understand’ mean that the formula has occurred to him, as the interlocutor assumes? To answer this, Wittgenstein gives us two different examples, in 179-b and 179-c.

In the first, Wittgenstein states that:

‘[T]he words “Now I know how to go on” were correctly used when he [B above] thought of the formula: that is, given such circumstances as that he had learnt algebra, had used such formula before.’

However, in the second example, Wittgenstein says that:

‘We can also imagine the case where nothing at all occurred in B’s mind except that he suddenly said “Now I know how to go on” – perhaps with a feeling of relief; and that he did in fact go on working out the series without using the formula. And in this case too we should say – in certain circumstances – that he did know how to go on’.

We are thus offered two different cases, where B exclaims ‘Now I can go on’ or ‘Now I understand’ in two different sets of circumstances. The main difference between them is that the formula occurs to B in 179-b, but doesn’t occur to him in 179-c, where ‘he did in fact go on working the series without using the formula’. In *PI* 180 and 183,

Wittgenstein concludes from the comparison of the two examples that the words ‘Now I can go on’ or ‘Now I understand’ are used in two different ways in the two different examples. Wittgenstein writes in *PI* 180: ‘It is quite misleading, in this last case, for instance, to call the words a “description of a mental state”. – One might rather call them a “signal”; and we judge whether it was rightly employed by what he goes on to do’.

It is important to note that Wittgenstein’s use of the term ‘the last case’ clearly refers to 179-c rather than the whole of 179, as some commentators presume (see the following section). In 179-c he is clear that ‘Now I understand’ is a signal, and because in that example the formula doesn’t occur to B, he concludes that it is quite misleading to call the words ‘Now I know how to go on’ a description of a mental state. This contrasts markedly with 179-b.

In *PI* 183, Wittgenstein re-visits the example of continuing the series and asks, ‘did "Now I can go on" in case (151) mean the same as "Now the formula has occurred to me" or something different? We may say that, in those circumstances, the two sentences have the same sense, achieve the same thing.’ Since *PI* 179-b is a case of the subject uttering the words “now I know how to go on” on the basis of the formula occurring to him, it seems as though in both cases Wittgenstein has reached the conclusion that, in certain circumstances, the two sentences can be used interchangeably. However, Wittgenstein is equally clear, and this is his key point, that this will not always be the case: ‘*in general* these two sentences do not have the same sense.’ (*PI* 183). This, as we have seen, is borne out by 179-c, where the exclamation is not conceived of as a description of a mental process/state precisely because of the different set of circumstances.

As a result, I claim we are entitled to draw the following conclusions. In considering whether the occurring of the formula is the defining common feature for all the cases of ‘understanding’, Wittgenstein has

considered two examples which, when analysed, demonstrate that the occurring of the formula, an inner process, is not necessary for 'understanding' and therefore cannot constitute its defining common feature. Whilst 179-b shows that the proposed definition might work on occasion, 179-c represents a clear counterexample in which the occurring of the formula is not necessary for understanding. The conclusion is that the proposed common feature for 'understanding' fails in its ambition.

I characterise the above examination as the negative side, where Wittgenstein argues that the proposed definition works in some cases, but not in all. Wittgenstein also suggests that 'understanding' is not a common feature concept, but it is a 'family concept', which represents the positive side of his approach. Wittgenstein writes: 'Think how we learn to use the expressions "Now I know how to go on", "Now I can go on" and others; in what family of language games we learn their use.' (*PI* 179). Wittgenstein thus takes 'understanding' to be a family concept, and not a common feature concept.

What I suggest is an interpretation which connects the negative and positive side of his treatment of 'understanding', in the same way we have seen with 'reading', and the combination of the two represents one of his approaches to the unity problem. The positive side is built on the work of the negative side, and is a continuation of it. The negative side is the part in which the interlocutor is looking for a defining common feature, and proposes the mental process to be this feature. In response, Wittgenstein tries to show that the proposed definition is unlikely to work for all cases, casting doubt on the likelihood of uncovering a defining common feature. However, in exposing the deficiencies of the common feature approach, Wittgenstein shows that there are different features which appear in some cases but not in all, and this provides the platform for his claim that these features constitute a family. In that sense, we see that the word is a family concept, and not a common feature concept.

This concludes my examination of Wittgenstein's passages on 'understanding'. In what follows, I will argue that some of the most influential interpreters misread the examined passages on 'understanding'. In 2.2, I will focus mainly on the negative side and the question whether 'mental processes' is part of the qualifying features of the family. In 2.3, I focus on the positive side and the implication of the notion that 'understanding' is a family concept'.

2.2. Alternative interpretations - the negative side

My reading of the three stages of the discussion on 'understanding' could broadly be summarised as follows. The first stage, *PI* 151-154, introduces the problem of looking at mental processes as a common feature. Wittgenstein ends this stage with the explicit remark that the discussion would be clearer after the discussion of 'reading'. In the second stage, he goes on to discuss 'reading', stating that under different circumstances we count different characteristics as definitive of whether some activity counts as reading, and thus that there is no one defining common feature of 'reading', but, rather, that it is best thought of as a family concept. Returning to the issue of 'understanding', he gives the reader two examples, one supportive and a counterexample, to show that the occurring of the formula or a mental process is not a feature common to all cases of 'understanding'.

A number of interpreters read these three stages differently. For some, they interpret the purpose of the first stage as being to demonstrate that 'understanding' is not a mental process. Fogelin comments on this stage saying that '[t]he point ... that Wittgenstein is making is that nothing occurring at the time of a performance shows that it is done with understanding; instead, we must appeal to the circumstances that surrounds the action to settle this question.' (Fogelin, 1987, p. 147). Hacker takes a similar line, explaining this stage of the discussion as follows:

‘Wittgenstein describes what happens when one suddenly understands, specifying various accompanying processes. Now one might think that understanding is one of these... But none of these accompanying processes is either necessary or sufficient for understanding. Understanding is not a mental process at all. What warrants a person’s utterance “Now I understand!” is not an inner state or process that he observes *in foro interno*, but the circumstances of the utterance’. (Baker and Hacker, 2005, pp. 306-307).

Both interpreters conclude that Wittgenstein states that ‘understanding’ is not a mental process, and that he suggests that what warrants an exclamation like ‘Now I understand’ are the circumstances of the utterance, not the presence or otherwise of any special experience or mental process.

The crucial difference between their reading and mine concerns their representation of Wittgenstein as denying at this stage that ‘understanding’ can be a mental process. Whilst I am happy to concede that the passages discussed show that ‘understanding’ *need not* be a mental process, Hacker’s and Fogelin’s claim is that it *cannot*. It is this stronger claim that I argue is unwarranted. After all, it certainly seems as though *PI* 155, as described by Wittgenstein, portrays a clear case in which recognition of possession of the formula (a mental state) justifies B in his assertion of his understanding. Thus, when Wittgenstein says that we need to look at the circumstances in order to judge whether the claim of understanding is warranted, it looks very much as though the possession of the formula can count as a qualifying feature. In other words, Hacker and Fogelin are not warranted in conflating Wittgenstein’s appeal to circumstances with the ruling out of mental processes or states: at the very least, nothing in his example shows that such states could not qualify as features. Hacker and

Fogelin have presumed a categorical distinction between inner processes and circumstances, but this is not explicitly argued for by Wittgenstein.

In any event, Wittgenstein, as we have seen, states that the issue will become clearer after the second stage of the discussion, in which he addresses the topic of 'reading' before returning to the discussion on 'understanding' in the third stage, and it is Hacker's reading of the 'reading' passages that is particularly important. As we saw earlier, Hacker takes the second stage to demonstrate that Wittgenstein's purpose is to show that 'reading' is not an inner process, a position endorsed by Glock and Fogelin. The idea, according to Hacker, is that because of these interim conclusions generated by the discussion of 'reading', when Wittgenstein returns to 'understanding' the reader will, as a result, be ready to see that 'understanding', too, is not a mental process. The determination that 'reading' is not an inner process or an inner experience but rather an ability to do certain things is therefore crucial to Hacker's wider view of 'understanding', and thus the strength of the arguments made in support of his position on 'reading' must, to a significant degree, also bear the weight placed on them by his similar position on 'understanding'.

In the previous section I argued that Hacker's reading is inaccurate. I diagnosed his presumption that Wittgenstein was concerned with the compatibility problem as a key determinant of his over-strong reading of Wittgenstein's examples, and that his conclusion that inner processes or experiences could never be part of the family of the qualifying features for 'reading' was unwarranted. As a result, my view is that Wittgenstein's insertion of the discussion on 'reading' is intended to show the reader a case that closely parallels understanding and from which the reader is encouraged to see that it is possible for

mental processes sometimes to represent a qualifying feature.⁴⁰ Therefore, when the reader enters the third stage of the discussion of ‘understanding’, her expectations will be different from those claimed by Hacker and Fogelin.

Nevertheless, independent of the preparatory work done by the discussion of ‘reading’, stage three, as we saw, has its own content. In order to determine precisely what Wittgenstein is saying at this point, I suggested that we have to pay attention to the subtle differences between *PI* 179-b and *PI* 179-c, and explicitly read *PI* 180, where Wittgenstein says that ‘Now I understand’ is a signal, as referring solely to *PI* 179-c (the ‘last case’).

Baker and Hacker and Fogelin also distinguish in their commentary between the two cases when discussing *PI* 179,⁴¹ but they appear to ignore the difference between the cases when it comes to reading *PI* 180. Thus, they each reach the conclusion that ‘Now I understand’ is not a report of a mental process, as if Wittgenstein in *PI* 180 were not commenting on just 179-c. Instead, they generalize the conclusion from *PI* 180 to all cases of someone uttering ‘Now I understand’, and thus conclude that this exclamation is not a description of a mental process. Hacker writes that “‘Now I can go on!’ does not mean “‘The formula has occurred to me’ ... We should rather consider the exclamation to be a *signal* of understanding (*PI* §§ 180, 323)’. (Baker and Hacker, 2009, p. 368). According to Fogelin, ‘Wittgenstein suggests that the expression “Now I know how to go on” is not a report of my mental condition, but rather a *signal*. Whether the signal is

⁴⁰ It is important to note that whilst Wittgenstein, in *PI* 156-178, *PI* 151-155 and *PI* 179-183, discusses different kinds of inner processes and experience, for Hacker and Glock none of the inner experiences or inner processes or mental processes discussed is considered constitutive of ‘reading’ or ‘understanding’. Hacker, for example, discusses in separate sections why ‘understanding’ is not an inner experience and why it is not a mental process. See Baker and Hacker, 2009, pp. 367-375.

⁴¹ See Baker and Hacker, 2005, p. 351 and Fogelin, 1987, p. 153.

correctly or incorrectly employed is borne out by what the person goes on to do'. (Fogelin, 1987, p. 153). Given the clear distinction between 179-b and 179-c, and Wittgenstein's apparently explicit reference to the latter in 180, this is a difficult move to justify.

In addition, it also appears as though their generalization can only be made if the commentators ignore Wittgenstein's suggestion in *PI* 183 that the exclamation might be a description of a mental process in some cases: 'But did "Now I can go on" in case (151) mean the same as "Now the formula has occurred to me" or something different? We may say that, in those circumstances, the two sentences have the same sense, achieve the same thing.' But it seems as though this is precisely what Baker and Hacker do. They comment on *PI* 183: 'It is slightly curious inasmuch as W. has already argued at length that the two sentences do not have the same meaning'. (Baker and Hacker, 2005, p. 354). This remark betrays Baker and Hacker's polarised reading of Wittgenstein's purpose. It seems far more plausible to me that Wittgenstein's aim is subtler, and that he is seeking to show, principally, that there is no common feature to 'understanding', and therefore that the two sentences will not always have the same meaning. However, and this is the subtlety that Baker and Hacker ignore, he equally acknowledges that, under specific circumstances, they *may* be equivalent, and this is the point that he is making clear in *PI* 183. Given that 183 occurs almost immediately after 179, and given that one of the two cases in question precisely mirrors that discussed in 179-b, it is difficult not to think that Wittgenstein is referring to 179-b.

PI 179, therefore, offers both a case where a mental process might be a feature of understanding (179-b) and a case where it clearly is not (179-c). Given this, Baker and Hacker's generalisation seems unwarranted. As a result, I take the third stage of the discussion on 'understanding' to underwrite the conclusions already reached

concerning inner processes and ‘reading’, namely, that the search for a common feature is likely to end in disappointment.

However, Wittgenstein’s discussion is not restricted to showing that mental processes need not be the common feature of understanding. Just as in the case of ‘reading’, he also proposes an alternative in the shape of the ‘family concept’. We will see in the next section that this interpretation has more support amongst commentators, although there are still areas of disagreement.

2.3. Alternative interpretations - the positive side

As we saw in the previous chapter, Wittgenstein suggests that an alternative to the common feature account is one in which examples are subsumed under the concept in question, rather than possessing such a single distinguishing feature instead share different kinds of relations and affinities in virtue of which they are referred to by the same word. This type of concept I termed a ‘family concept’. I argued that ‘reading’ is such a concept and that Wittgenstein intends us to draw a similar conclusion regarding ‘understanding’. In particular, I argued that mental processes, whilst neither necessary nor sufficient in *every* case, qualify as features of this family concept ‘understanding’.

However, some commentators argue for a different reading. They argue that, whilst it is possible to read Wittgenstein as characterising ‘understanding’ as a family concept, inner and mental processes are not (ever) one of the features of this family. Prominent amongst these interpreters are Glock, and Baker and Hacker. Glock writes that Wittgenstein ‘may have ... held that linguistic understanding and other types of understanding, like understanding people or AESTHETIC understanding, are connected by overlapping similarities.’ (Glock, 2009, p. 374). In other words, Glock allows that ‘understanding’ might be a family concept. Baker and Hacker agree that Wittgenstein largely

dispels the idea of ‘understanding’ being a common feature concept: ‘one may plausibly claim that understanding utterances, music, painting, women, politics, life, etc. have no common properties in virtue of which they are all cases of understanding’. (Baker and Hacker, 2009, p. 223). However, they leave open the issue of whether Wittgenstein regarded ‘understanding’ as some sort of family concept: Wittgenstein ‘does not explicitly commit himself to the view that it [understanding] is a family-resemblance term.’ (Baker and Hacker, 2009, p. 385).

Secondly, and more importantly, though, they argue that even if ‘understanding’ is, or might be, a family concept, Wittgenstein does not regard it as a mental process. Baker and Hacker write: ‘[W]e must distinguish, as Wittgenstein later did, between the phenomenological accompaniments that may accompany understanding something said or read and the understanding’. (Baker and Hacker, 2009, p. 223). For them, the inner processes or the mental processes that might be present in cases of ‘understanding’ simply are never qualifying features of ‘understanding’. Glock has a similar reading. He explains that:

‘Understanding is neither a mental nor a physical event, process or state. This is not to deny that there may be characteristic mental or physiological ‘accompaniments’ of understanding, it is to deny only that these *constitute* our understanding.’ (Glock, 2009, p. 374).

This issue concerning whether mental processes or phenomena may or may not on occasion qualify as features of ‘understanding’ is almost identical to the dispute discussed in section 1 concerning ‘reading’. Hacker, in particular, clearly carries through his stance from ‘reading’

to ‘understanding’,⁴² and, perhaps not surprisingly, my objections to his stance on ‘understanding’ are similar to those I raised against his position in the earlier context.

In particular, I take the view that Wittgenstein is not seeking to show that mental or inner processes can *never* be qualifying features for ‘understanding’: that would be too strong a reading. Instead, in his initial negative approach, he is intent on showing that what we might have thought was a necessary condition for ‘understanding’ turns out not to be. In other words, the occurring of the formula is not necessary for an event to be considered a case of ‘understanding’, as demonstrated by the counterexample in 179-c. However, as in the case of ‘reading’, it also seems clear that Wittgenstein offers examples that *support* the idea that mental processes can be the qualifying feature for ‘understanding’, in the right circumstances. Thus, in cases like *PI* 179-b, if the person in question ‘had learnt algebra’ and ‘had used such formulae before’, then the occurrence of the formula is reported by the exclamation ‘Now I understand’, and the mental process reported qualifies as a valid feature of ‘understanding’.

And, again, it seems clear to me that Wittgenstein does not adopt his negative method, just so that he can offer an alternative common feature in its place. Rather, his purpose is to demonstrate that both ‘reading’ and ‘understanding’ are not common feature concepts, his consequent positive method suggesting that they are both better regarded as family concepts. Under such a construal, it seems likely that mental processes would qualify as one of the many features that, in the right circumstances, could constitute ‘understanding’.

⁴² Fogelin’s text is less detailed. On the one hand he, unlike Hacker and Glock, doesn’t hesitate to attribute to Wittgenstein the view that ‘understanding’ is a family concept: he writes that the ‘examination of instances [of understanding] reveals...a family of loosely interrelated cases’ (Fogelin, 1987, p. 152). However, he doesn’t include inner processes in the family.

However, there are two potential issues that my reading may have to address. The first of these concerns Wittgenstein's use of the term 'accompaniments' in connection with the mental processes or feelings that he (and Hacker and Glock) recognises are present on occasion in cases of 'understanding'. I have to acknowledge that, *ceteris paribus*, the term generally implies a lack of centrality, and it is clearly this connotation that Hacker and Glock pick up on. However, if one takes the view that Wittgenstein's purpose is to negate the claim that understanding is always a mental process, and that mental processes are not the common feature present in all cases of 'understanding', then it is possible to see Wittgenstein's use of this particular term as a rhetorical device aimed at characterising mental processes as peripheral rather than central, thereby questioning and destabilising the framework of the common feature presumption, rather than ruling mental processes out as qualifying features under all circumstances.

In any event, far more important than a debate over semantic implications is the proper analysis of the case which we have been explicitly discussing (179-b and 179-c), where Wittgenstein directly compares two cases of 'understanding'. Here, there is no mention of the term "accompaniments". Instead, we are given, in 179-b, what Wittgenstein presents as a *bona fide* case of understanding in which the presence of a valid mental process is central. By contrasting this instance with 179-c, he shows that the case in which mental processes justified the use of the term 'understanding' cannot be generalised to all cases. But there is no suggestion that the presence or otherwise of mental processes are somehow not directly relevant. Indeed, it seems that their presence or otherwise is Wittgenstein's particular focus, and constitutes the essence of his argument in showing that they are not necessary in all cases. It seems to me, therefore, that Hacker and Glock have placed too much emphasis on the term 'accompaniments', generalising beyond its context in a way that is not warranted, and failing, in my view, to recognise Wittgenstein's main intentions and argument in these passages.

The second area for comment concerns the idea that ‘understanding’, and ‘reading’, are abilities. As we have seen above, this notion is used by commentators to argue against the idea that mental processes could ever be qualifying features for ‘understanding’. Hacker’s reading of the passages on ‘understanding’ is that they should be taken to show that Wittgenstein thought that ‘understanding’ is not a mental process but, rather, an ability. Hacker writes:

‘[P]hilosophy is concerned with questions that require, for their resolution or dissolution, the clarification of concepts and conceptual networks ... These concepts are constituted by the sense-determining rules for the use of the words we use ... So, for example, “understanding is an ability, not a mental state or process” is tantamount to the grammatical explanation that to say that someone understands something is not to say what mental state he is in or what process is taking place in his mind, but to indicate something he can do.’ (Hacker, 2009, p. 143-144).

According to Hacker, Wittgenstein clarifies the sense-determination rules for the use of ‘understanding’ and draws the conclusion that it is nonsensical to say that ‘understanding’ is a mental process or state, suggesting instead that ‘understanding’ should be conceived of as an ability.

A key reason given by Hacker for this conclusion is Wittgenstein’s treatment of the exclamation ‘Now I understand’ discussed earlier. Hacker is adamant that Wittgenstein’s purpose here is to provide evidence in support of his contention that understanding is not a mental process. Thus, Hacker writes that “‘Now I can go on!’” does not mean “‘The formula has occurred to me’” ... We should rather consider the exclamation to be a *signal* of understanding (PI §§ 180,323)’.

(Baker and Hacker, 2009, p. 368). Hacker therefore takes Wittgenstein to have set out rules, based on our ordinary language, for the use of the concept ‘understanding’, and to have drawn the conclusion that ‘understanding’ is not a mental process based on examples that demonstrate that to regard ‘understanding’ as a process that is taking place in the mind violates those rules.

Glock takes a similar line, both on Wittgenstein’s method and his specific position in relation to ‘understanding’. He represents Wittgenstein’s method as consisting in tabulating rules which prevent us from violating the bounds of sense: ‘Grammatical rules ... determine the prior question of what it makes sense to say ... [The function of these rules] is to *draw attention* to the *violation* of linguistic rules by philosophers, a violation which results in nonsense.’ (Glock, 1991, pp. 77-78).

So far as his opinion on Wittgenstein’s stance on ‘understanding’ is concerned, the entry under ‘understanding’ in Glock’s Wittgenstein dictionary reveals the following conclusion: ‘[U]nderstanding is neither a mental nor a physical event, process or state.’ (Glock, 1996, p. 374). Glock explains that ‘linguistic understanding is an ability ... the mastery of the techniques of using words in countless speech activities.’ (Glock, 1996, p. 376). As for the exclamation ‘Now I understand’, he takes *PI* 179-181 as a whole to show that ‘it is not a description or a report, but an AVOWAL of understanding.’ (Glock, 1996, p. 374).

In the same vein, R. Fogelin comments on the passages we examined, concluding that understanding is ‘not an *occurrent* mental state, because understanding involves an ability to do various things which, whatever mental state we may happen to be in, we may not be able to perform when called upon to do so’. (Fogelin, 1987, p. 152). According to him, ‘Wittgenstein suggests that the expression “Now I know how to go on” is not a report of my mental condition, but rather

a *signal*. Whether the signal is correctly or incorrectly employed is borne out by what the person goes on to do'. (Fogelin, 1987, p. 153).

Whilst not all the commentators cited above comment explicitly on Wittgenstein's method, and whilst their individual interpretations of Wittgenstein's discussion of "Now I know how to go" have subtle differences, their common claims can, I think, fairly be represented as follows. Firstly, Wittgenstein's writing is best viewed through the lens of the compatibility problem. He is seeking to establish rules for the employment of particular terms based on ordinary language usage, and violations of these rules will be shown as nonsense. Secondly, 'understanding' should not be equated with a mental process, but should instead be regarded as an ability.⁴³

My position on these conclusions is similar to that presented in the analysis of 'reading'. I argue that it is both more plausible and more productive to regard Wittgenstein's writing on 'understanding' as focused on the unity problem rather than the compatibility problem, and that the proposal that 'understanding' should be regarded as an ability *and not as a mental process* represents too strong a reading of Wittgenstein's text and turns out, again, to be a by-product or consequence of the compatibility problem presumption.

In fact, I am happy to concede that understanding is an ability precisely because I regard its being so as orthogonal to the issue under discussion.⁴⁴ According to my analysis above, there are different features of 'understanding', and abilities and mental processes are some of them. In seeking to set up an exhaustive disjunction, mental

⁴³ Similar readings are presented in Pitcher (1964) and Hallett (1977).

⁴⁴ Wittgenstein writes in *PI* 150: 'The grammar of the word "knows" is evidently closely related to that of "can", "is able to". But also closely related to that of "understands". ('Mastery' of a technique)'.

process or ability, Glock and Hacker interpret beyond what is warranted by the text itself, and do so because they focus on the compatibility problem: seeking to identify instances where philosophers misuse ordinary language. But Wittgenstein's purpose in these passages is, I claim, better seen as focusing on the unity problem, for the reasons argued above.

Viewed through this perspective, the apparent exhaustive disjunction is dissolved: both 'reading' and 'understanding' may be described as abilities without ruling out mental processes as potential qualifying features. Indeed, it is worth noting that regarding 'reading' and 'understanding' as abilities *tout court* runs the risk of licensing the idea that being an ability is a *common* feature and 'reading' and 'understanding' are, therefore, both common feature concepts, a notion Wittgenstein clearly has set his sights against throughout these passages. Again, it seems as though downplaying the unity problem, or presuming the compatibility problem, has caused these commentators to ignore the finer grained issue of whether features may be necessary or simply sufficient on occasion, an issue that would be highlighted were they to view Wittgenstein's writing through the lens of the unity problem.

In case this conclusion might still be in doubt, recall Hacker's insistence that we should consider the exclamation "Now I know how to go on" to be a *signal* of understanding. I showed earlier that his view simply generalises from 179-c and ignores the more powerful counterexample of 179-b, in which it seems perfectly clear that Wittgenstein recognises that, under specific circumstances, mental processes can be the qualifying feature for 'understanding'. As implied by my earlier commentary, it is difficult not to read Hacker as forcing the text somewhat to conform to his own presuppositions.

As a result, I conclude that Wittgenstein's text and method argue against Hacker's strong conclusion that the purpose of the passages

discussed is to show that the mental processes or feelings that on occasion accompany ‘reading’ or ‘understanding’ can *never* be features of ‘reading’ or ‘understanding’. It seems to me far more plausible to take Wittgenstein as demonstrating that the common feature view that such features are *necessary* for an act of ‘reading’ or ‘understanding’ cannot be sustained, but that this finding in no way entails that mental processes can *never* be qualifying features.

I showed earlier how, in the context of ‘reading’, Hacker’s preoccupation with finding inconsistencies or incompatibilities between the philosopher’s use of language and the way in which ordinary language actually works generally inclines him to take a somewhat black-and-white approach of ruling in or out absolutely. This, in turn, leads him often to interpret Wittgenstein as following a similar polarising line. As a consequence, in the context we have been discussing, he paints Wittgenstein as ruling out absolutely mental processes as features of ‘reading’ and ‘understanding’ precisely because, for him, the only alternative would be to rule them in as *necessary* features, something we all agree Wittgenstein is against. The text, however, does not support the strength of this interpretation and the exhaustive disjunction, as I have argued. Instead, I regard it as more plausible to take Wittgenstein to be following a softer and more subtle line, simply seeking to show how to negate common feature claims, whilst allowing that mental processes, may be qualify as members of the family of features that make up ‘reading’ and ‘understanding’.

3. Conclusions

In the introduction, I said that the two main aims of this chapter were, firstly, to show the importance of the unity problem for Wittgenstein in the context of specific, prominent examples from his work, and, secondly, to substantiate my earlier claim that his treatment of these concepts does not fit well into the model presumed by the

compatibility problem. The analysis above has shown that the unity problem is central to his discussion of ‘reading’ and ‘understanding’ in that his primary purpose is to demonstrate that the assumption that there must be a common feature for these concepts is not justified, and, instead, that these concepts are family concepts.

In doing so, I highlighted the two sides to Wittgenstein’s method: one negative and the other positive. Wittgenstein’s work on the negative side is designed to show that the proposed definition need not work for all cases, but may still work for some. In both ‘reading’ and ‘understanding’ this approach is evident, and consists in Wittgenstein’s offering a counterexample to the proposed common feature alongside an instance that supports it. The purpose of this is twofold: the counterexample shows that the presence of the feature under examination is not a necessary condition for a phenomenon to be subsumed under the concept. The supporting example, however, allows that such a feature might, nevertheless, under specific circumstance, be the qualifying feature. This lays the groundwork for the second stage, the positive approach, in which Wittgenstein suggests that the concept in question is better conceived of as a family concept, phenomena falling under the concept in virtue of their possessing features which are not necessary but which overlap, and are related to, those of other members in the appropriate way.

Note that Wittgenstein does not explicitly specify the particular relations that obtain between different cases of ‘understanding’ or ‘reading’ that make them family concepts. We saw that this leaves room for some commentators, such as Glock and Hacker, to interpret him as saying that the examined concepts might be family resemblance concepts. However, I think this stronger reading is not justified by the text, and I prefer to claim only that the more generic term ‘family concept’ applies here.

I also highlighted the influence that the presumption of the compatibility problem, in which it is assumed that the focus should be on philosophers saying something which we would not say in OL, has on the way in which Wittgenstein is read in the passages analysed. I showed in his discussions on ‘reading’ and ‘understanding’ that his focus is not on the claim that what philosophers say is incompatible with OL. I argued against Hacker’s strong conclusion that the purpose of the passages discussed is to show that the mental processes or feelings that on occasion accompany ‘reading’ or ‘understanding’ can *never* be features of ‘reading’ or ‘understanding’, and diagnosed the problem with his approach as stemming from his (compatibility problem) preoccupation with finding inconsistencies or incompatibilities between the philosopher’s use of language and the way in which ordinary language actually works. This, I claimed, generally predisposed him to take a somewhat absolutist approach, leading him to impute a similar polarising line to Wittgenstein. This resulted in his portraying Wittgenstein as ruling out absolutely mental processes as features of ‘reading’ and ‘understanding’ precisely because the only alternative would be to rule them in as *necessary*, something we all agree Wittgenstein is against. I have argued that this strong interpretation is not supported by the text and that one should, instead, see Wittgenstein as simply seeking to show how to question common feature claims, whilst allowing that mental processes may qualify as members of the family of features that make up ‘reading’ and ‘understanding’.

Overall, therefore, it seems clear that Wittgenstein’s focus in these important examples is on the unity question, and that a preoccupation with viewing his work through the lens of the compatibility problem is likely to lead to misinterpretation and a failure to acknowledge an

important aspect of Wittgenstein's philosophy that has wider ramifications.⁴⁵

This concludes my examination of Wittgenstein's treatment of the unity problem. In the next two chapters I examine Austin's approach to the same question. My analysis will follow a similar pattern to that taken in the treatment of Wittgenstein, in that I will, in chapter 4, examine the theory behind Austin's position before, in chapter 5, analysing his treatment of specific examples.

⁴⁵ I find a similar issue regarding 'thinking', *PI* 317-341, where I take it that Wittgenstein wants to show that inner processes are part of the family of features of thinking, meanwhile commentators such as Hacker, Glock and others take Wittgenstein to show that 'thinking' is not an inner process.

If my reading is accurate, then it will change the way we understand Wittgenstein's work on psychological concepts, the inner / outer and the issue of behaviourism in Wittgenstein's writings. Many philosophers find Wittgenstein's work to be behaviourist. And it seems to me that the above commentators give a behaviourist reading to the text, because their reading excludes inner and mental processes from the features of 'reading', 'understanding' 'thinking'...etc. My reading is not behaviourist, since it includes inner and mental processes into the constitutive features of reading, understanding, thinking...etc. I don't have space to follow the issue further, but it is one of the interesting results of the above examination.

Chapter 4

Austin and the unity question

Introduction

This chapter and the next address Austin's work on the unity problem. Austin is generally considered one of the main figures in OLP, along with Wittgenstein, Ryle, and Strawson, and most interpreters, as we saw in the first chapter, tend to portray these four philosophers as focussing on the compatibility problem, cases where philosophers say something which we would not say in OL in the discussion of various philosophical problems (such as the mind-body problem, the nature of truth etc.), identifying it as a common source of philosophical difficulties.

In this thesis I argue that this reading is too restrictive and that interpreting their thought in this way tends to understate or miss their contribution to important elements of OLP. My claim is that the problems that they are concerned to expose are often significantly different from the characterisation given by such interpreters. In the cases of Austin and Wittgenstein, in particular, I claim that viewing their writing exclusively through the lens of the compatibility problem leads commentators to neglect a particular thread in Austin's and Wittgenstein's writings in which they identify a different problem: what I badge the 'unity problem'. The unity problem arises when we look for one common thing in all of the cases in which the same word is used, and it is this presupposition that Austin and Wittgenstein show can lead to philosophical trouble.

In chapter 2 I examined Wittgenstein's treatment of the unity question as it appears, for instance, in the passages *PI* 65-67. Here, Wittgenstein argues that there need not be one common thing in virtue of which we use the same word in different cases, but rather that there might be

different kinds of relations and affinities between such cases. We term these concepts ‘family concepts’, in contrast with ‘common feature concepts’. In chapter 3, I examined concrete examples from the *PI* in the context of discussing specific philosophical problems, where Wittgenstein tries to show that each concept he discusses need not have something in common in all its uses.

In the analysis of Austin in the next two chapters I will follow a similar pattern to that taken with Wittgenstein. In this chapter I principally examine Austin’s answer to the unity question, relying on reconstructions and extracts from his works and writings. In the next chapter, I study Austin’s application of this answer in the context of discussing specific philosophical problems, in particular his discussions on ‘real’ and ‘truth’. Throughout both chapters I attempt to be as faithful as possible to Austin’s writing, but rendering his account completely systematic in the way that is necessary to illustrate the key points made in these two chapters has its difficulties and requires a little interpretation at times. In particular, it is not possible to have complete certainty regarding all of the detail of the three key distinctions that he makes in relation to grammatical function and meaning, due to a level of inconsistency and some gaps in his writing. However, I indicate explicitly where any licence is taken.

The structure of this chapter is as follows. In section 1, I introduce the unity problem as Austin sees it. Then, in section 2, I examine early Austin’s treatment of the question. In sections 3 to 7, I examine later Austin’s treatment of the question. Finally, in section 8, I draw some conclusions.

1. The problem introduced

The unity problem raises the following question: Is there something in common between all of the cases for which we use the same word? According to Austin, as we shall see, philosophers give the following answer: There must be something in common in virtue of which we

use the same word in different cases. Austin scrutinises this answer and argues that in OL things are more complicated than this.

He starts by distinguishing between two kinds of words: words that have one meaning, and words that have multiple, unrelated meanings. In his examination of the different uses of ‘real’, Austin points out that this word ‘does not have one single, specifiable, always-the-same meaning... Nor does it have a large number of different meanings - it is not *ambiguous*, even “systematically.”’ (Austin, 1962, p. 64). According to Austin, there are words that have always-the-same-meaning, like ‘yellow’ or ‘horse’, and, on the other hand, there are ambiguous words like ‘bank’, which can mean either a financial institution or the edge of a river. These are completely different meanings.⁴⁶ There is, nevertheless, a middle ground between these two kinds of words. According to Austin, many philosophers neglect that third kind. He writes; ‘If we rush up with a demand for a definition in the simple manner of Plato or many other different philosophers, if we use the rigid dichotomy “same meaning, different meanings”... we shall simply make hashes of things.’⁴⁷ (Austin, 1979, p. 74). The root cause of the problem, as Austin sees it, is that philosophers don’t study OL. If they did, they would see that many words have a number of different but related meanings.

However, as we shall see, there are differences between early Austin and later Austin. Although the question is the same, the notion of ‘what is in common’ or ‘one meaning’ is used in two different ways in his writings. Early Austin seems to define it as ‘the one entity the word names’. Later Austin, however, uses it as the ‘one feature or characteristic...etc.’ which is common between all of the cases for which we use the same word. The change in how this idea is used is

⁴⁶ ‘Yellow’ and ‘horse’ are Austin’s examples; ‘bank’ is mine.

⁴⁷ Austin takes Plato to be committed to the search for one meaning for each word. Elsewhere, he also contrasts this with Aristotle.

related to the development of Austin's work, and, accordingly, he gives two different answers to the unity problem. Early Austin argues that in OL, there need not be something in common in terms of what the word denotes. Later Austin argues that there might sometimes be something in common on an 'abstract' level, but that there also are many differences, which philosophers ignore, at the 'concrete' contextual level. I will explore each of Austin's answers in detail.

2. Early Austin on the unity question

Early Austin introduces the question and identifies the problem as a commitment to the doctrine of naming. In 2.1, I will explain what the doctrine states, and in 2.2 I examine early Austin's objections to it.

2.1. The doctrine of naming

The doctrine, which Austin identifies as essentially stemming from a problematic presupposition regarding how individual words function in OL, states the following: All individual words are proper names, words name objects, and every word is correlated with one object, which is the meaning of the word. Austin writes that 'there is the curious belief that all words are names, i.e., in effect proper names, and therefore stand for something or designate it in the way that a proper name does.' (Austin, 1979, p. 69). According to Austin, then, there is an assumption that all words function in the same way as proper names, designating objects in the world. Every proper name denotes one object in the world.⁴⁸ Austin seeks to question whether concept-words function in this manner.

⁴⁸ This is what I take from Austin's early articles on proper names: that every proper name denotes one object in the world. It seems that Austin endorses this view on proper names in his early writings. However, here he was not interested in proper names in themselves, only mentioning them in his discussion on universals and concepts. He discusses proper names later in 'How to Talk'. For our purposes we are only interested in the doctrine and its effect on concepts.

Austin notices that concepts are usually explained by reference to universals. For this reason he examines first the nature of a universal. The standard understanding goes as follows: 'It is assumed that we do "sense" things, which are many or different... [and] we make the practice of calling many different *sensa* by the same single name.' (Austin, 1979, p. 33). He continues; 'since we use the same single name in each case, there must surely be something "there" in each case: something of which the name is the name: something, therefore, which is "common" to all *sensa* called by that name. Let this entity, whatever it may be, be called a "universal".' (Austin, 1979, pp. 33-34). Since we call different things by the same name, it is suggested, there must be something identical between all of these cases. This common thing is the universal, for which the word stands. Austin explains that this is applied to any object of 'acquaintance'. It doesn't make any difference, for the doctrine, whether these things are material objects or what is known as 'sense data', or even non-sensuous. He then explains that there is a 'suppressed premise which there is no reason whatever to accept, that words are essentially proper names'. (Austin, 1979, p. 38). According to this premise, each proper name denotes one object, and since all words are essentially proper names, each individual word stands for one object. This premise leads us to the notion that there must be something in common between all the cases for which we use the same word. A concept-word thus names one entity, the universal.

To summarise, the suppressed premise is that all words are proper names, and that each individual word stands for one 'entity' in the world. Therefore, concept-words also function as proper names, and each concept-word stands for one 'entity'. But we use concept-words in different cases, so there must be something in common between all the cases in which we use the same concept-word. This object, the common thing, is the abstract entity, the universal, which the concept-word names. The object that the word names is the meaning of the

word. According to the doctrine, then, each individual word denotes one thing, and thus has one meaning.⁴⁹

2.2. The early objections

In objecting to the above approach, early Austin retains the denotational framework, but denies that each individual word denotes one thing. His target at this stage, therefore, is not specifically the unity question in all its guises, but the unity question insofar as it is sustained by the idea that words must always denote a single object. For Austin, the position is more subtle than this notion, and he seeks to show that some words denote different kinds of things, in different ways, and that such words might have a number of different but related meanings. He asks, ‘why, if “one identical” word is used, must there be “one identical” object present which it denotes? Why should it not be the whole function of a word to denote many [different kinds of] things?’ (Austin, 1979, p. 38). Thus, instead of postulating one entity, the universal for which the concept-word stands, Austin suggests that some words might denote many different kinds of things. He thinks that there are many ‘different kinds of good reasons to call different things’ by the same word. (Austin, 1979, p. 70). In what follows, I examine briefly four examples given by Austin to support the idea that there need not be one meaning, one entity, that a word denotes in all of its uses.⁵⁰

The first example is taken from Aristotle: the word ‘healthy’.⁵¹ Austin writes that ‘[w]hen I talk of a healthy body and again of a healthy

⁴⁹ What I called ‘the doctrine of naming’ was discussed by many philosophers at the time. See, for example: Carnap, 1967, p. 97, Wittgenstein’s *PI* passage 1, and Ryle’s ‘Theory of Meaning’, Ryle (1963). Different objections to the doctrine are raised from different points of view. It would be interesting to follow the issue and compare the different objections. However, I confine myself to Austin’s objections.

⁵⁰ Austin gives seven reasons in ‘The Meaning of a Word’; here I discuss the four clearest.

⁵¹ Here, I confine myself to explaining what Austin takes Aristotle to say. Whether Austin’s reading is accurate or not is not relevant for us.

complexion, of healthy exercise: the word is *not* just being used equivocally.’ (Austin, 1979, p. 71). He then explains that there is a primary nuclear sense of ‘healthy’⁵², the one used for a healthy body; ‘I call this nuclear because it is “contained as a part” in the other two senses, which may be set out as “productive of healthy bodies” and “resulting from a healthy body”.’ (Austin, 1979, p. 71). Austin thus claims that the word doesn’t have just one meaning in all its uses, but three different meanings. His objection to the doctrine of naming, therefore, is that its proponents should not claim that a word always has one and the same meaning, namely the one ‘entity’ the word denotes.

Some might be tempted to object that the common nuclear entity is the element that all three uses have in common and is the entity that the word names. Austin’s point, however, is that this cannot tell the full story. Whilst the nuclear element is indeed contained in the other meanings, claiming that this abstract entity is what each of the different uses means cannot tell anything like the full story of meaning, since it would mandate that all three uses had the same meaning, the nuclear one. The nuclear element allows the three meanings to be related and yet not identical.

The second example covers words such as ‘youth’ and ‘love’, ‘which sometimes mean the object loved, or the thing which is youthful, sometimes the passion “Love”, or the quality “youth”’. (Austin, 1979, p. 73). Austin maintains that the two uses clearly have different meanings not one, and that there is no one ‘entity’ that the word names in the two uses. Equally, though, he thinks that this is clearly not a case of simple ambiguity, since the two uses are not unrelated.

The third example is very close to Wittgenstein’s notion of family resemblance (which we examined in the second chapter) in which a

⁵² Later in the chapter we will see that the nuclear word is something of a prototype for Austin’s treatment of dimension words.

network of similarities exists between the different cases rather than each case denoting a common object. According to Austin, it is the former rather than the latter which justifies our using the same word in these different cases. As Austin puts it: ‘Another case is where I call B by the same name as A, because it resembles A, C by the same name because it resembles B, D... and so on. But ultimately A and, say, D do not resemble each other. This is a very common case: and the dangers are obvious, when we search for something ‘identical’ in all of them!’ (Austin, 1979, p. 72). Again, the presupposition of the doctrine of naming is shown to be false in that there is no one common object denoted in all cases.

Austin’s fourth example focuses on words such as ‘fascist’: ‘[T]his originally connotes, say, a great many characteristics at once: say x, y, and z. Now we will use “fascist” subsequently of things which possess only *one* of these striking characteristics.’ (Austin, 1979, p. 72). In that case, we don’t use the word because there is something identical between all cases of its use, some one entity the word denotes. The doctrine assumes that there is one abstract ‘entity’ the word names, but there is no one common thing named in all the cases here. Rather, we use the word in situations where one of the many characteristics of ‘fascist’ might apply.

Early Austin’s general contention in the context of the doctrine of naming is therefore that there need not be one identical thing/abstract entity the word names in all its uses. In each example, the word has different related meanings, a phenomenon which the doctrine seems unable to account for due to its central presumption that there is one meaning for each word and that this is the entity which the word denotes. He suggests widening the investigation to incorporate a study of the ‘different kinds of good reasons to call different things by the

same word' in OL, and is confident that this would show us that the doctrine of naming is wrong⁵³.

Austin's question was 'why, if "one identical" word is used, must there be "one identical" object present which it denotes? Why should it not be the whole function of a word to denote many [different] things?' (Austin, 1979, p. 38). He has answered this by showing that when we use the same word in different cases, the word need not denote one entity. Instead, it has different related meanings and might denote different kinds of things, in different ways.⁵⁴

Later Austin, however, shifts his target from the doctrine of naming and its focus on a single entity determining meaning, and instead addresses the unity question in a different manner, examining the assumption that 'what is in common' is instead the 'one common feature, or characteristic' which defines the use of a word. However, it is only against the background of early Austin's initial remarks about 'what is in common' that we can fully understand the depth and importance of this later work. In sections 3 to 7, I set out later Austin's answer to the unity question.

⁵³ See Austin, 1979, p. 38 and pp. 69-74.

⁵⁴ Austin relates this discussion to an 'historical dispute': the nominalist-realist dispute on universals. See Austin 1979, p. 70. According to Austin, the realists think that there must be something in common: 'some entity or other to be that of which the "name" is the name' (Austin, 1979, p. 69). This is the universal. The nominalist replies that the reason that we call different things by the same word is that they are similar. Austin notes that it is always open to the realist to respond to this by saying that they are similar in 'a certain respect, and that can only be explained by the common feature'. (Austin, 1979, p. 70). For Austin, the nominalist's reply is not satisfactory. He suggests that we examine the linguistic facts where we will see different reasons to call different things by the same word. There is nothing identical, but to say that there is similarity is also misleading.

3. Later Austin on the unity question

Later Austin makes two distinctions that are fundamental to his answer to the unity problem. The first distinguishes between the grammatical function of a word and its meaning, and the second between two types of meaning that the word might possess. The grammatical function is the *role* of the word, e.g., to name, to exclude, to adjust, and words can be typed by their grammatical function (excluder words, adjuster words and so on). Meaning, on the other hand, involves two levels: what Austin terms ‘abstract meaning’/‘semantic function’ and ‘specific meaning’. The former, in virtue of being abstract, might well be consistent across uses of the word in different contexts and cases, whereas the latter is likely to vary depending on the circumstances and contexts in which the word is used.

These distinctions underpin the later Austin’s stance on the unity question, and also explain its development. Whilst the early Austin showed that words need not name one thing, he nevertheless presumed the framework in which naming was the sole function of a word. The purpose of the later Austin’s focus on the grammatical function is to show that such a framework is too restrictive and does not reflect the way words work: words may have many different grammatical functions, and, in certain cases, multiple grammatical functions at the same time. Thus, for later Austin, a consideration in answering the unity question was understanding and identifying the grammatical functions of words.

So far as meaning is concerned, by giving up the framework of naming the later Austin is able to expand the list of factors to be considered in answering the question of what words might have in common beyond simply the object denoted, and to include in addition ‘characteristic’⁵⁵,

⁵⁵ See Austin, 1962, p. 70.

‘criterion’⁵⁶, and ‘account’⁵⁷. The unity question is then to be put in the following way: does the word have one meaning/something in common, in all its uses, whatever its function is? As we will see, by introducing the two levels of meaning, the later Austin is able to show that the answer to this question is both positive and negative. Yes, it may have something in common at the abstract/semantic function level, and no, it need not have anything in common at the concrete level that takes into account context. For Austin, it is the presence of this abstract level that leads philosophers into both the commitment to a common feature, and the misleadingly polarised dichotomy ‘one meaning/different meanings’.

In what follows, in this chapter and in the next, we will see that he is at pains to show that this abstract level is extremely thin and will not bear such weight, and it is often the misplaced reliance by philosophers on the substance of this layer that can be identified as the culprit in generating philosophical problems. Austin instead shows that the focus in determining meaning should predominantly be on the concrete level, but that this poses severe difficulties for the unity problem because the specific meaning will vary depending on context and will typically not provide a common specific meaning.

In sections 4 to 6 of this chapter I examine three kinds of words that Austin discusses in his later writings, words that he terms ‘adjuster-words’, ‘trouser-words’, and ‘dimension words’ respectively. The analysis will proceed through the lens of the three level model, looking at the three levels in turn, and clarifying and expanding the general points made above. In doing so, Austin’s stance on the unity question will become apparent. However, the vehicle of the three level framework is something of a reconstruction based on Austin’s writing, rather than an explicit device that he overtly employs. It therefore

⁵⁶ See Austin, 1962, p. 76.

⁵⁷ See Austin, 1962, p. 83.

needs to be handled with care, not least because in Austin's work not every level is given equal treatment in the discussion of each kind of word, and therefore a little "gap filling" is occasionally required. Nevertheless, I will demonstrate that the model is a valid representation of his explicit and implicit position, and, where I have to fill gaps, I will explain my reasoning.

4. Trouser-words

The first kind of word which I will examine is what Austin terms 'trouser-words'. I will start with the grammatical function in 4.1, before turning to the two levels of meanings in 4.2.

4.1. Grammatical function

Trouser words have a complicated and slightly counterintuitive grammatical function. To explain this, I start with Austin's distinction between positive looking words (such as 'real', 'freely', 'voluntarily', 'advertently', 'intentionally', and so on) and negative looking words (such as 'unreal', 'involuntarily', 'inadvertently', 'unintentionally', and so on). He says that the affirmative use of the term is usually basic; 'to understand "x", we need to know what it is to be x... [and] knowing this apprises us of what it is not to be x'. (Austin, 1962, p. 70). In other words, the positive looking word has a positive meaning and is basic, and the negative looking word is a negation of the positive one. The negative looking word thus doesn't add anything by itself, it only rules out the possibility of the positive looking one.

However, some words work in the opposite way, and these he terms 'trouser-words'. Austin explains; 'it will not do to assume that the "positive" word must be round to wear the trousers; commonly enough the "negative" (looking) word marks the (positive) abnormality, while the "positive" word... merely serves to rule out the suggestion of the abnormality.' (Austin, 1979, p. 192). Words such as 'real', 'free', and

‘directly’ work in this way. While they are positive looking words, they serve merely to negate a contextually implicit negative looking word. Thus, the word that wears the trousers, has the positive meaning, is the implied negative looking word. This is best understood by looking at the examples Austin offers, starting with ‘real’.

According to Austin, ‘a definite sense attaches to the assertion that something is real... only in the light of a specific way in which it might be... *not* real.’ (Austin, 1962, p. 70). For example, the phrase ‘a real duck’ is used to rule out the possibility of an apparent duck being a dummy, a toy, a picture, a decoy, etc. In this use of ‘real’ as a ‘trouser-word’, ‘real’ has nothing positive itself to add, but only excludes the possibility of something being unreal.

Another example is the word ‘directly’; ‘it is essential to realize... that the notion of perceiving *indirectly* wears the trousers - “directly” takes whatever sense it has from the contrast with its opposite.’ (Austin, 1962, p. 15). For example, you can contrast ‘seeing directly’ with ‘seeing through a periscope’, or ‘seeing something in the mirror’, or ‘seeing the shadow on the blind’. Or, again, you can contrast ‘hearing the music directly from inside the concert hall’ with ‘hearing it from outside the hall’. In all of these cases, ‘directly’ is used to rule out the possibility of something being perceived indirectly, but has nothing positive to add in itself. To perceive something directly is thus to rule out the possibility of perceiving it indirectly.⁵⁸

‘Free’ is another example; ‘[w]hile it has been the tradition to present this [free] as the “positive” term requiring elucidation, there is little doubt that to say we acted “freely”... is to say only that we acted not un-freely... Like “real”, “free” is only used to rule out the suggestion of some or all of its recognized antithesis’. (Austin, 1979, p. 128).

⁵⁸ All the above examples on ‘real’ and ‘directly’ are from Austin’s *S & S*.

From these examples we can see that in the case of trouser words the positive *looking* word is not in fact the one that leads in determining the meaning: that role is taken by the negative looking word. What Austin is showing is that there is no a priori reason why the positive looking words should “wear the trousers”, and that in the cases he discusses they clearly do not. Instead, the positive looking word functions as an excluder, ruling out one, or some, or all of its opposites⁵⁹.

There is an obvious potential objection to Austin’s position. How is a ‘trouser-word’ different from other kinds of words, which are not ‘trouser-words? Doesn’t being ‘red’, for example, exclude being green or yellow, etc.? An answer to this objection is given by Roland Hall in his article on ‘excluders’. Hall explains Austin’s position on the difference between an excluder and what he calls a ‘simple predicate’, such as being ‘red’.⁶⁰ ‘It may not be clear why “bare” is an excluder and “red” not, since it might be maintained that “red” could be defined as not-green, not-blue, etc.’⁶¹ (Hall, 1959, p. 5). The difference is the following: ‘whereas “red” would be a genuine predicate even if it *could* be defined negatively, “bare” is an excluder because it *must* be defined negatively.’ (Hall, 1959, p. 5). Excluders do not have positive meanings by themselves; they can *only* be defined negatively, in the sense of saying what they exclude. While a simple predicate, such as ‘red’, might be defined negatively, it also has a positive meaning by itself, and we can define it by this positive meaning. In other words, a simple predicate has a positive meaning independent of such a

⁵⁹ One of the difficulties in immediately understanding Austin's account of trouser words is that the word he badges ‘trouser word’ (the positive looking word that merely excludes) is not the one that wears the trousers (this being its (often contextually implicit) opposite, the negative looking word).

⁶⁰ It seems that Hall’s account of excluders is wider than that given by Austin: an excluder is any word which excludes its opposite, and doesn’t add anything positive by itself. Austin focuses mainly on words that look positive, but which exclude their opposites; these are ‘trouser-words’. See Hall (1959).

⁶¹ ‘Bare’ is one of Hall’s examples of excluders.

negative construction – it does not need to be defined as ‘not-green’, ‘not blue’, etc... Excluders are different, Hall contends, in that they can *only* be defined by their opposites, not possessing themselves an independent positive meaning.

To summarise then, the grammatical function of a ‘trouser-word’ is to rule out the possibility of its opposite(s) in a particular context. Its import for Austin in the discussion of specific philosophical problems is that it challenges the assumption that the ‘positive looking word’ must always be the one to which philosophers pay attention, and, when we ask philosophical questions such as ‘what is real?’ and ‘what is freedom?’, it is likely that we will need to understand what is excluded and the context in which this exclusion arises. This latter point is explored further in the discussion below.

4.2. Meaning - The semantic function and different specific meanings

Austin explains why a trouser-word need not have one specific meaning by suggesting that there are two levels of exclusion. The first level is the exclusion of different kinds of things; the second level concerns the exclusion of different cases of the same kind of things. Again, this is best explained with the help of examples, starting with “real”.

According to Austin, ‘the function of “real” is not to contribute positively to the characterization of anything, but to exclude possible ways of being not real - and these ways are both numerous for particular kinds of things, and liable to be quite different for things of different kinds.’ (Austin, 1979, pp. 70-71). He offers examples of the former first. ““A real duck” differs from the simple “a duck” only in that it is used to exclude various ways of being not a real duck - but a dummy, a toy, a picture, a decoy, &c.; and moreover I don't know just how to take the assertion that it's a real duck unless I know just what, on that particular occasion, the speaker has it in mind to exclude.’

(Austin, 1962, p. 70). Thus, the phrase ‘a real duck’ potentially excludes many different things, but only if I knew the specific situation would I know which one of the different things is excluded.

Take another example. A ‘real knife’ might be used to exclude different ways of being not-a-real-knife; for example, being a ‘real knife’ would exclude being a toy knife for a doll’s kitchen, or might even exclude being a small knife in situations where what you need is a big knife, or a dull knife if you need a very sharp one, and so on.⁶² Being a ‘real duck’, or a ‘real knife’, excludes different things. There is no one way of being not-real for any specific type of thing: it is the context that determines what is specifically excluded, and therefore what being “a real x” means.

In addition, there are different ways of being not-real for different kinds of thing. Being a ‘real knife’, for example, is different from being a ‘real duck’, and different again from being a ‘real diamond’, which might exclude being a rhinestone or a piece of glass in costume jewellery.⁶³

In an important indication of his stance on the unity question, Austin comments further, saying that the above examples shows ‘why the attempt to find a characteristic common to all things that are or could be called “real” is doomed to failure.’ (Austin, 1962, p. 70). Because we use ‘real’ to exclude many different kinds of things, and many different variations of any given kind of things, it doesn’t have one defining characteristic in all of its uses.

‘Real’ is not the only example available to us. Any of the trouser words listed earlier, such as ‘directly’, will pattern in the same way, yielding

⁶² Austin mentions ‘a real knife’ in a different context, where he states that ‘real’ might be a dimension-word, as I will explain below. However, the different ways of being not a ‘real knife’ are my examples.

⁶³ The example is from Austin, 1962, 67.

the same moral. In all of these examples, there is no one characteristic, feature or criterion which helps us to understand the word in all of its uses.

However, whilst this means that, in the context of the three level model discussed earlier, almost all of the meaning of a trouser word seems to be determined by the context of its use (the second level of meaning), asserting that such words have no abstract level (the first level of meaning) would be going too far, and Austin is clear in rejecting such a view. Austin's explanation of the way in which the word 'real' works is more sophisticated and suggests that there is, in fact, something in common between cases of 'realness' on one level, but nothing in common on another level; '[I]t is this identity of general function combined with immense diversity in specific applications which gives the word "real"... the baffling quality of having neither one single 'meaning', nor yet ambiguity, a number of different meanings.' (Austin, 1962, pp. 70-71). Although Austin is not explicit about which 'function' is meant here, the 'grammatical function' or the 'semantic function', it seems almost certain that we should take 'function' here to mean the 'semantic function' (i.e., the first level of meaning). Austin is clearly talking about 'real', rather than trouser words in general, and the 'general function' that provides a common identity is that which covers all the cases of the application of real, not all the cases of trouser words.

Thus, it is the abstract meaning/semantic function which Austin describes as 'general', and it is this thin abstract level which is shared between all the cases in which we use the same trouser word. However, as we have seen above, the work is done at the concrete level where the word may have many different specific meanings when used to exclude its opposite. The 'abstract meaning' alone cannot be used to determine what is excluded, its function being almost entirely restricted to the merely taxonomic, i.e., providing a general identity sufficient to differentiate it from other words but insufficient to

determine, in anything other than that differentiating, its meaning. Thus, in the context of determining what words have in common and the advisability of using that common factor as the basis for analysing philosophical problems, Austin is clear. The different uses of the same word do have something in common, but it is far too abstract and ephemeral to give us a proper sense of how it works. For this, we must turn our attention to the use of the word in its specific context. In the case of trouser words, this will determine for each use the specific negative looking word that the positive looking trouser word excludes. For each trouser word the range of possible contexts of use, and therefore possible meanings, is vast.

In summary, trouser words have a complicated and novel grammatical function in which the positive looking word, despite being described as a trouser word, does not in fact wear the trousers. The work is done by the (often implicit) negative word. So far as the meaning of trouser word is concerned, this cannot be determined to any useful degree without attention to the context of use. Although, in terms of the three level model, trouser words have something abstract in common that differentiates the sum of their uses from that of other trouser words, this abstract level is unable to contribute substantially to the determination of the meaning of the trouser word in any specific usage. Instead, meaning is almost entirely determined by the particular negative looking word that the specific context of employment generates. It is the context that picks out the precise negative looking word from the enormous range of possible opposites to the positive looking trouser word.

Thus, to summarise the analysis of trouser words using the specific vehicle of the three level model: they have a complicated and novel grammatical function that places the weight in terms of meaning determination on the context, for it is this that will determine the specific word that wears the trousers. Trouser words also have an abstract layer (or semantic function), but this is thin and serves merely

to provide type identity. The second layer of meaning, the concrete or contextual, is extremely rich and is the principal factor in determining meaning in any specific use of the trouser word. As a result, approaches to philosophical problems that rely principally on the presence of a common feature in all uses of the word under discussion are likely to encounter difficulties, and Austin's message, from the study of trouser words at least, is that progress will only be made when focus is turned to the specific context in which the word is used.

5. Dimension-words

Dimension words are discussed in many places in Austin's writings and are the most important of the three types of word discussed in this chapter, at least for the purposes of the thesis. Although it is not explicitly acknowledged by Austin, their genesis may stem from his earlier ideas concerning nuclear words, although there are some key differences between the two types, as will become apparent. A dimension word, according to Austin, 'is the most general and comprehensive term in a whole group of terms of the same kind, terms that fulfil the same [semantic] function.' (Austin, 1962, p. 71). Interestingly, as we will see, dimension words don't seem to have any specific grammatical function of their own, although, in certain cases, they can also (at the same time) be other types of word, such as trouser words, in which case they can inherit the grammatical function of that other type. I will expand on this feature towards the end of the section, but the absence of a specific grammatical function for dimension words means that the analysis that follows focuses initially on the two levels of meaning.

5.1. Meaning - semantic function and different specific meanings

In Austin's works there are two 'dimension-words' which are discussed in depth: 'truth' and 'real'. 'Truth' will be studied in depth in the next chapter, and so here the focus will be on 'real' and other

dimension words which are less prominent in his writing but clarify important aspects of the term.

Following Austin's definition of a dimension word given above, 'real' is the most abstract term in a group of words which have the same semantic function, the same abstract meaning. Members of this group of terms, 'on the affirmative side, are, for example, "proper", "genuine", "live", "true", "authentic", [and] "natural"; and on the negative side, "artificial", "fake", "false", "bogus", "makeshift", "dummy", "synthetic", [and] "toy".' (Austin, 1962, p. 71). Thus, 'real' picks out a set of terms which all possess the same semantic function, the abstract meaning 'real', but which are also individually chosen in their different forms in order to convey the particular sense of 'reality' (or its opposite) appropriate to the specific context in which they are used. This becomes explicit when we look at Austin's treatment of 'good' and 'freedom', both also dimension words.

'Good' is described by Austin as 'the most general of a very large and diverse list of more specific words, which share with it the general [semantic] function of expressing *commendation*⁶⁴, but differ among themselves in their aptness to, and implications in, particular contexts' (my italics). (Austin, 1962, p. 73). Here, Austin reiterates the notion that the semantic function serves to identify the group of words in virtue of their shared abstract meaning, but he also makes explicit the idea that such an abstract concept is often too general to capture the required specific meaning in a particular context of use.

It is, however, in his discussion of 'freedom' that Austin best clarifies his use of the term 'dimension' for these types of words. He claims that just '[a]s "truth" is not a name for a characteristic of assertions, so "freedom" is not a name for a characteristic of actions, but a name of

⁶⁴ From this it is clear that the interpretation of function intended by Austin must be semantic and cannot be grammatical, 'commendation' being the abstract *meaning* shared by the family of words.

a *dimension* in which actions are assessed' (my italics). Here the semantic function of the different terms within the 'freedom' family is to assess the responsibility of the person engaged in an action, with the range of terms available relating to the many ways 'in which each action may not be "free"'. (Austin, 1979, p. 179).⁶⁵

Dimension words, then, define a semantic dimension and the range of terms appropriate to the particular abstract meaning or semantic function of the particular dimension word. The dimension word could, in fact, substitute for any of the members of the family of words within its dimension in virtue of all members possessing this abstract meaning along with their own context specific concrete meaning. However, the necessarily abstract nature of the meaning of the dimension word means that its usage in particular situations would be unlikely to convey the required specificity of concrete meaning. This is apparent if we look at an example. The difference between the dimension word 'real' and the less abstract terms in its family of words is the following: 'the less general terms on the affirmative side have the merit, in many cases, of suggesting more or less definitely what it is that is being excluded; they tend to pair off, that is, with particular terms on the negative side and thus, so to speak, to narrow the range of possibilities.' (Austin, 1962, p. 71.) Austin offers some examples of this; '[I]f I say that I wish the university had a proper theatre, this suggests that it has at present a makeshift theatre; pictures are genuine as opposed to fake, silk is natural as opposed to artificial, ammunition is live as opposed to dummy, and so on.' (Austin, 1962, p. 71). In each of these cases, that which is excluded is more clearly defined, and the intended meaning better captured, because the more specific and more

⁶⁵ On the relation between responsibility and freedom, Austin states that 'questions of whether a person was responsible for this or that are prior to questions of freedom... to discover whether someone acted freely or not, we must discover whether this, that, or the other plea will pass—for example, duress, or mistake, or accident, and so forth.' (Austin, 1979, p. 273). For us, the point is that 'free' is the most abstract term in a group of words that have the same semantic function.

concrete member of the family is used rather than the more abstract dimension-word.

Thus, it is clear that, although the abstract meaning/semantic function of all of the terms in one family is the same and is constant in all the uses of a dimension word, Austin wants to show, in a similar manner to the discussion concerning abstract meaning in trouser words, that identifying this ‘common thing’ and focusing on it will not provide a sufficiently robust or accurate basis on which to determine meaning. As a result, philosophical discussion or analysis that focuses on the abstract component of meaning is likely to run into problems, as will be shown in more detail in chapter 5. Instead, we need to know the different features, or characteristics, or criteria, for each specific concrete case, as it is these which will enable us to accurately distinguish real from not real, good from not good, and free from unfree in the particular circumstances of their use, and apprehend more precisely what is meant. The semantic function, or abstract meaning, is too thin; it needs to be supplemented by the specific meaning, which is to be changed according to the context.

It is the combination of the shared abstract meaning and the context-related specific meaning which means that dimension words don’t have one meaning in all of their uses, and yet are not ambiguous. Rather, they have a number of different-but-related specific meanings which are unified by their common possession of the ‘abstract meaning’ of the term.⁶⁶

We are now in a position to review the grammatical function of dimension-words.

⁶⁶ Note the difference between Wittgenstein and Austin: Austin uses the term ‘family’ when he is talking about a family of words; Wittgenstein uses the term when he is talking about family of cases where we use the same word.

5.2. Grammatical function

The similarities between trouser words and dimension words in terms of meaning are apparent from the discussions of each: both appear to have an abstract and concrete layer, and in both cases it is the concrete, or specific meaning, which is the more important in any given use of the word. So far as the grammatical function of a dimension word is concerned, the fact that most of the examples Austin discusses are words that are both dimension words and trouser words might lead us to similarly equate their grammatical functions, and to attribute the grammatical function of excluding to all dimension words. This, for example, appears to be Jean-Philippe Narboux's reading. However, in what follows I will argue that identifying the two kinds of word, and taking excluding to be the grammatical function of dimension words, is not justified by the text, and even Narboux does not consistently maintain this position. Instead, I will argue that dimension words, in and of themselves, possess no particular grammatical function. Rather, they are able to inherit the grammatical functions of other types of word.

From the perspective of meaning, Narboux⁶⁷ characterises dimension-words in a manner similar to that given above, citing the same passages. For Narboux, 'the "dimension of assessment" designated by a "dimension word" is named after the most general and comprehensive term fulfilling the function around which it revolves. Examples of dimension words that he [Austin] gives are "felicitous", "real", "good", "true", "beautiful" and "serious"'.⁶⁸ (Narboux, 2011, p. 216). However, Narboux also gives an explicit account the

⁶⁷ Narboux's main focus is what he calls 'terms of assessment'. These, for Narboux, assess the relation between words and the world, and include terms such as 'real/not real', 'free/unfree', 'true/false', and so on. He focuses especially on the dichotomies of 'sense/nonsense' and 'true/false'. The discussion of 'dimension-words' attempts to show that focusing only on these dichotomies, and thus ignoring the less abstract words in the associated dimension, leads to philosophical problems. See Narboux (2011).

⁶⁸ I take it that Narboux here means the 'semantic function'.

grammatical function of ‘dimension-words’, which he explains in the following way:

‘[T]he dimension-word... only acquires a special importance from a special ability to rule out a variety of specific ways of going wrong on a variety of specific occasions and for a variety of specific purposes. It does so in virtue of the abovementioned feature (shared by dimension-words) of being a ‘trouser-word’, that is, a word whose positive use is parasitic upon its negative use.’ (Narboux, 2011, p. 220).

Narboux therefore seems to claim that dimension words are *necessarily* (“in virtue of being”) trouser words, and thus they have the grammatical function of excluding, although towards the end of the article he softens this stance, stating that ‘[d]imension words are *typically* “trousers words”.’ (Narboux, 2011, p. 237).

There is little to object to in the weaker reading: the dimension words that Austin cites are indeed typically also trouser words, but there is no textual evidence that Austin intended the stronger interpretation. It seems from the description of ‘dimension words’ that a dimension word is the word that plays the role of the most abstract term in a family of words that share the same semantic function, and that there is no necessary relation between this semantic role and any specific grammatical function. I suggest therefore that dimension words, in and of themselves, possess no particular grammatical function. Rather, they are able to inherit the grammatical functions of other types of word. To be sure, when a dimension word operates as a trouser word it acts in precisely the way that Narboux claims, but this is in virtue of the grammatical function of the trouser word, not that of the dimension word.

Finally, it is important, particularly for the analysis that takes place in the next chapter, to remember that Austin’s interest in ‘dimension-words’ is related to specific philosophical problems. His complaint is

that philosophers usually focus on the most abstract terms, the dimension-words, and try to give an account of these abstract terms without any regard for how they are used in specific contexts. His suggestion is that examining less abstract terms from the same dimensional family, and realising that troublesome philosophical words like ‘true’, ‘real’ and ‘good’ don’t have any one specific meaning that covers all their uses, will help us to answer troublesome philosophical questions.

In the next chapter, I will discuss in greater detail ‘truth’ as a dimension-word in Austin’s work in order to explain more clearly the importance of dimension-words.

6. Adjuster words

The third kind of word to be examined, again utilising the vehicle of the three level framework, is the ‘adjuster word’.

6.1. Grammatical function

Adjuster words are words ‘by the use of which other words are adjusted to meet the innumerable and unforeseeable demands of the world upon language.’ (Austin, 1962, p. 73). According to Austin, ‘our language contains words that enable us... to say what we want to say in most situations.’ (Austin, 1962, p. 73). I label these cases, where words need no particular adjustment or qualification, ‘ordinary cases’. However, Austin claims, there are rarer cases or situations where it turns out that such words are inadequate on their own, and I don’t know what to say: I label these situations ‘extraordinary cases’. It is in this kind of case that we use adjuster words. The difference between the two types of cases is crucial to understanding the grammatical function of adjuster words.

I gave an account of ‘extraordinary cases’ in the second chapter, where I discussed open and closed concepts. A closed concept is a concept which is liable to a universal definition. For a definition to be

universal, i.e., applicable to all possible cases, it must be applicable to cases which have not yet happened, including novel or unpredictable situations, and, in those cases, the definition must be able to tell us whether the case at hand counts as X or not. We have seen that both Wittgenstein and Austin argue that there might be concepts in OL which leave the boundaries open. I called such concepts ‘open concepts’. Here are the two examples of extra ordinary cases that we addressed.

The first example is from Austin: ‘Suppose I was asked if the bird which I see is a goldfinch, and I say “I am sure it is a real goldfinch”, and then it does something outrageous, like explodes or quotes Mrs. Woolf... [in such a case] *we don’t know what to say*’. (Austin, 1979, p. 88).

The second example is from Wittgenstein:

I say, ‘There is a chair.’ What if I go up to it, meaning to fetch it, and it suddenly disappears from sight?——
‘So it wasn’t a chair, but some kind of illusion.’——
But in a few moments we see it again and are able to touch it and so on.——‘So the chair was there after all and its disappearance was some kind of illusion.’——
But suppose that after a time it disappears again—or seems to disappear. What are we to say now? Have you rules ready for such cases—rules saying whether one may use the word ‘chair’ to include this kind of thing?
(PI 80)

The point of these examples is not *simply* to argue that something is or is not a chair, or that something is or is not a goldfinch; the point is that in situations such as these I don’t know explicitly how to decide whether the disappearing/reappearing chair is a chair, or whether a Woolf-quoting goldfinch is a goldfinch or not. There are no rules to tell me what to say in such circumstances. In OL, we might sometimes

face such novel cases which invite us to decide whether or not we want to extend a concept in order to include the case at hand. Open concepts leave the boundaries of application open to the inclusion of new, novel cases which may involve changing the way in which we use the concept-word. This is what is meant by expanding the boundaries of a concept.

Austin distinguishes between extraordinary cases and ordinary cases in the following way: ‘the position... is that at a given time our language contains words that enable us... to say what we want to say in most situations that are liable to turn up. But vocabularies are finite; and the variety of possible situations that may confront us is neither finite nor precisely foreseeable.’ (Austin, 1962, pp. 73-74). According to Austin, there are familiar cases in which I know how to distinguish X from not-X, but there are also other cases in which I don’t necessarily know what to say because I am not familiar with them. When we face an extraordinary case, a case which we are not familiar with, the ordinary use of language ‘breaks down’ , and we are potentially left speechless. (Austin, 1979, p. 68). Austin suggests that there are some devices in OL which help us to say something at this point. Although we are unfamiliar with the extraordinary cases, we can adjust our language to cope with the difficulties using these devices. Adjuster words help us to say something in these extraordinary cases.

The following example may be helpful in illustrating Austin’s point. ‘One day we come across a new kind of animal, which looks and behaves very much as pigs do, but not quite as pigs do’. (Austin, 1962, p. 74). What would we do in this case? There are many possibilities. We might invent a new word for these creatures, but what we would probably do first is to say ‘it is not a real pig’, or that ‘it is not a *true* pig’ but instead merely something ‘like a pig.’ (Austin, 1962, pp. 74-75). In these examples, we use ‘adjuster words’ such as ‘like’, ‘true’

and ‘real’⁶⁹ to help us ‘handle the unforeseen.’ (Austin, 1962, p. 75). We thus adjust the word ‘pig’ by using an adjuster word, thereby coming to refer to the ‘pigs’ with which we are familiar as ‘real pigs’ or ‘true pigs’. As for the new kind of animals, we are still not sure what to call them; they are creatures which are ‘like pigs’. We might at some later point come to call them pigs, but we might not. Or we might invent a new word for these creatures. In the meantime, however, when faced with a new phenomenon which seems to defy our ordinary use of language, ‘adjuster words’ can help us to say something.

The grammatical function of adjuster words is not to name things: it is to adjust other words.

6.2. Meaning - semantic function and different specific meanings

The grammatical function of an adjuster word is now hopefully clear, and, from the account of its operation above, it is equally apparent that the employment of an adjuster word in a particular situation serves to qualify or extend the specific meaning of other words along a particular aspect (likeness, realness, etc.) relevant to the specific context of use, enabling us to say something meaningful in novel situations. The straightforward implication of this is that the specific meaning of an adjuster word is clearly likely to change with the circumstances of its use. I will set out Austin’s position on this before examining whether, despite his focus on specific meaning, adjuster words also have a semantic, or abstract, function. The answers to both questions are relevant to the unity question.

⁶⁹ Note that these words are used in other contexts in which they do not function as adjuster words: ‘real’, for example, is used as a trouser-word in ordinary cases, and ‘like’ is used in a family of words related to ‘look’ and ‘seem’ in ordinary cases (see *S & S*, chapter IV). ‘True’, meanwhile, is used to assess the relation between utterances and facts (see the next chapter of this thesis). There is no need to assume that there is one grammatical function for any of these words.

Austin explains that there is not any single ‘always the same [specific] meaning’ for ‘real’ (when used as an adjectival word), stating that ‘there are no criteria to be laid down *in general* for distinguishing the real from the not real.’ (Austin, 1962, p. 76). Rather, the criteria ‘must depend on what it is with respect to which the problem arises in particular cases’. (Austin, 1962, p. 76). The reasons for not having any general criteria are twofold, and are similar to those offered in the context of trouser words earlier. In the first place, there are different kinds of things to which adjectival words can be applied in different extraordinary cases; and, in the second, even when applied to one particular kind of thing, there may be different extraordinary cases or situations which call on the adjectival word to be applied in different ways. Austin uses ‘real’ as an example that illustrates both.

He invites us to compare the above example of the pig with a situation in which ‘someone produces a new kind of wine, not port exactly’, but similar to what we call port. (Austin, 1962, p. 75). In this latter case, we might well use adjectival words, describing the new drink as ‘like port’, but not a ‘real port’. This, according to Austin, differs significantly from the example of the pig-like creature above, as the criteria which we use to distinguish a real pig from the pig-creature are not the same as those which we use to distinguish the real port from the new kind of wine. What it means for something to be a ‘real pig’ is not the same as what it means for something to be a ‘real port’, and this finding justifies his first reason.

Moreover, Austin argues, ‘even for particular kinds of things, there may be many different ways in which the distinction may be made (there is not just one way of being ‘not a real pig’)’ and this will depend on the particular circumstances in which the adjectival word is used.⁷⁰ (Austin, 1962, p. 76). This seems to validate his second reason, and the combination of the two demonstrates that an adjectival word need

⁷⁰ Austin doesn’t give an example here.

not have one defining characteristic, one specific meaning in all of its uses because we use it to adjust many different kinds of things, (pig, port...etc.) and to adjust in many different circumstances any given kind of thing.

Each time we adjust a word in an extraordinary case, we use the word with a new specific meaning. What is adjusted by an adjuster word, and how it is adjusted, depend on the particular case, and thus we cannot formulate any general criteria with which to distinguish, for example, 'real' from 'not real' in every possible situation: we can't find one specific meaning for the adjuster word in all its uses. 'How this is to be done [the adjusting] must depend on what it is with respect to which the problem arises in particular cases' and 'this depends on the number and variety of the surprises and dilemmas nature and our fellow men may spring on us, and on the surprises and dilemmas we have been faced with hitherto.' (Austin, 1962, p. 76).

An adjuster word is likely to have a 'new specific meaning' each time it is used, because the extraordinary case is novel and the adjusting needs to correspond to this novelty. The very idea of adjusting an extraordinary case presupposes something with which we are not familiar and this will in turn demand a new specific way of adjusting the words to this novel circumstance.

The grammatical function and specific meaning of an adjuster word are now clear, but we have not yet investigated whether adjuster words possess a semantic function or abstract meaning. Unfortunately, Austin is silent on this matter in his discussion of 'adjuster words', but I think it is appropriate to attempt to fill that gap, and I suggest a familiar way in which adjuster words may be taken to possess semantic function, albeit 'thinly'.

The rationale will be familiar from our discussion of trouser words. Adjuster words clearly operate within different aspects of adjustment (likeness, realness, etc), and some property or criterion individuates

each adjuster word so as to differentiate it from its conspecifics. These differences can only exist at the level of the semantic function of the various words since, as with trouser-words above, it is difficult to see how we could distinguish between different words that have the same grammatical function (in this case adjuster words) if the content of the semantic function or abstract level was empty. Nor could the answer come from within the third level, that of specific meaning, since at that level the particular adjuster word has already been identified.

However, the abstract meaning/semantic function which is held in common between all of the cases of use of a particular adjuster word is clearly thin – the minimum necessary to enable individuation and choice between adjuster words. As with trouser words, the semantic weight rests almost completely on the specific meaning, which in turn is heavily dependent on the context or circumstances of use: I need to know exactly what is being adjusted and the relevant circumstances in order to know what the adjuster word means in any particular case.

From this we can see that it is again the combination of the (thick) diverse concrete features and characteristics of the use of a word in a particular context along with the (very thin) abstract meaning of a word, the semantic function, that gives a word what Austin describes as the feature of not having one univocal meaning in all of its uses, and yet not being ambiguous. Rather, such words have a range of different but related specific meanings which are minimally unified by the ‘abstract meaning’.

7. Interim summary

I can now compare and contrast the three words types from the perspective of the three level framework. This will organise the findings in preparation for the discussion of Austin’s answer to the unity question addressed in the last section.

Firstly, so far as grammatical function is concerned, trouser words and adjuster words each have individual and significant grammatical functions, whereas dimension words appear to lack such a property, inheriting any grammatical function that they do exhibit in any particular circumstances in virtue of also being, in that specific case, another type of word, such as a trouser word or an adjuster word.

Secondly, there are important differences between the three words in terms of meaning. All three word types have an abstract meaning or semantic function, but in the case of trouser words and adjuster words, this is minimal, being sufficient only to differentiate specific words within the word type from each other. In the case of dimension words, however, the abstract level is 'thicker', and could allow the substitution of the dimension word for any of the members of its family in any specific circumstances. However, Austin is clear that, even in these cases, the abstract level remains relatively thin and that such a substitution would almost always fail to capture the *specific* meaning on any specific occasion of use. As a result, reliance solely on the content of such an abstract semantic function to determine meaning in any given circumstance would result in significant problems, particularly in philosophical enquiry.

This is because, thirdly, in the case of all three word types it is the specific meaning that carries the semantic weight, and the specific meaning is highly context and circumstance dependent. These meanings are, however, related, and it is the common abstract layer, or semantic function, that performs this function, although the strength of this relation varies in proportion to the thickness or thinness of the particular type of word's abstract component.

8. Conclusions

In this chapter, I have used the analysis of the three word types to elucidate Austin's answers to the unity question: i.e., do we use the same word in different cases because the cases have something in common? Austin tackles the question by attacking the answer given by philosophers who adopt the false dichotomy that words must either have one unequivocal meaning or a number of different meanings, and those who also support the notion that a word either has just one and the same meaning in all instances of its use or is ambiguous and has a number of totally different meanings. In opposition to this, Austin wants to show that there are some words which have a range of different-but-related meanings. The problem as he sees it is that philosophers ignore these kinds of words.

I have characterised Austin's writings as having two distinct phases, early Austin and later Austin, and each of these periods provides a different sense of how Austin understands the notion of there being something 'in common' between all uses of a word. Early Austin accepts the general denotational framework but rejects the specific 'doctrine of naming' which construes 'one meaning'/'what is in common' as referring to a single entity that the word denotes. Contrary to this doctrine, he suggests that a word might stand for various different kinds of things, not just one 'entity'.

Later Austin, on the other hand, targets the doctrine of naming in a more radical way and attacks the basic denotational assumption that all words must name things. He suggests that 'naming' is just one function that words fulfil: a word might function to adjust other words in extraordinary cases, as in 'adjuster words', or to exclude its opposite, as in 'trouser-words', and so on. So far as determining meaning is concerned, he suggests that looking for the entity, or even entities, that a word names is therefore not necessarily the route that should be followed. Instead of the exclusively denotational framework, he thinks that meaning will rather depend on the different

features, characteristics and criteria that a word might have in the various different circumstances in which it is used.

However, he distinguishes between two levels of 'meaning' and acknowledges that, whilst it is clear that at the lower level of concrete or 'specific' meaning this diversity is present and it is driven by circumstance or context, at the abstract, or semantic function, level there *is* something that is held in common by the word in all its uses. However, in the case of trouser words and adjuster words this is minimal, and even in the case of dimension words it is insubstantial and certainly insufficient to be the predominant focus of enquiry if the objective is to determine the meaning of a word. Thus, such words might have something in common, but Austin has reset the perspective on how significant this common feature in fact is.

Despite these differences between two Austin's periods, a level of consistency is also apparent. Nuclear words, for instance, such as 'health', from his early period, are similar in character to dimension words and may in some sense be considered prototypes for the latter: in both cases the nuclear or abstract element unifies, and is contained in, the relevant family of words. The main difference between the two largely consists in different levels of strength between the nuclear word the abstract level of the dimension word: the former is considerably stronger and can operate more easily without qualification, whereas the latter, although it can be substituted for members of its family, lacks the substance or specificity to represent the meaning in particular circumstances of use. This difference, perhaps, indicates the increasing importance that Austin accorded to context as his philosophy developed.

The above summary provides a reasonably stable theoretical platform from which to examine, in the next chapter, two of the central examples in Austin's writings of his treatment of the unity problem in the context of some philosophical problems. Analysing in depth his treatment of 'real' and 'truth' will show in particular how fundamental

the notion of a dimension word is to his treatment of specific philosophical problems and the development of his theory of speech acts. Throughout, it will be apparent that interpreting Austin as being concerned with the unity problem rather than the compatibility problem is a far more fruitful approach to explaining his thought, as well as being a more plausible way of representing his interests and interpreting his texts.

Chapter 5

Examples from Austin

Introduction

In the previous chapter I examined the theory behind Austin's answer to the unity question, i.e., do we use the same word in different cases because the cases have something in common? He approaches the question by attacking the answer given by philosophers who adopt the false dichotomy that words must have either one unequivocal meaning or a number of different meanings, and subscribe to the notion that a word either has just one and the same meaning in all instances of its use, or is ambiguous and has a number of totally different meanings. Austin seeks to show that there are some words which have a range of different-but-related meanings, and his concern is that philosophers ignore these kinds of word.

In this chapter, I will examine Austin's application of his answer in the context of discussing specific philosophical problems. Using two central examples in Austin's writing, his discussions on 'real' and 'true', I will show that the failure to recognise that some words have different related meanings can be a serious source of philosophical problems, and will underline the importance of the unity problem.

Section 1 addresses how we might distinguish between reality and appearance in the case of material things. Austin examines Alfred Ayer's approach and finds it unsatisfactory because it is too narrow. Ayer's mistake, according to Austin, is to take specific examples of usage in OL and generalise from these to claims about all uses. In doing so, he ignores the varied range of uses present in ordinary language which invalidate such generalisations.

The rest of the chapter is taken up with the discussion of ‘true’, and its impact on Austin’s wider philosophical interests. Austin thinks that ‘true’ is a dimension word and, in virtue of this, that all of its uses do have something in common, what, in the previous chapter, we called the ‘abstract meaning’ or semantic function. Equally, in common with all other dimension words, ‘true’ also does not have one *specific* or concrete meaning that is consistent and stable in all contexts and circumstances of use. This discovery plays a central role in his wider contribution to a range of issues in the philosophy of language. It is not only part of his objections to Ramsey’s redundancy theory of truth and Strawson’s performative theory of truth, it is also central to the genesis of his theory of speech acts.

I will show that underestimating the importance to Austin of ‘true’ as a dimension word led to what I call the ‘propositional interpretation of locutionary meaning’, introduced by John Searle and P.F. Strawson. I will argue for a different interpretation, one which is closer to Charles Travis’s ‘pragmatic interpretation’. If my reading is accurate, it will shed light on Austin’s answer to one of the central questions in philosophy of language, the nature of truth and its relation to meaning.

Finally, in the conclusion, I will summarise the relation between the unity problem and the compatibility problem. The examples examined will demonstrate that Austin’s focus was more on the former than the latter, contradicting the received view in OLP.

1. Real

Austin discusses ‘real’ in two chapters in *S & S*. In the first, chapter VII, he writes that ‘real’ ‘does not have one single, specifiable, always-the-same *meaning*...*Nor* does it have a large number of different meanings.’ (Austin, 1962, p. 64). The chapter is dedicated to showing that there are many different related meanings of ‘real’, and that it might possess different grammatical functions: it might be an ‘adjuster

word', a 'trouser-word', and a 'dimension word', as we have seen. In chapter VIII in *S & S*, Austin explains what he finds problematic in one influential philosophical account of how to distinguish reality from appearance: Ayer's discussion of 'real'. He writes, 'what is wrong in principle with Ayer's account of the use of 'real' is just that he is attempting to give one account- or two...'. (Austin, 1962, p. 83). In what follows I will examine Austin's objections in detail (1.1), before analysing Ayer's reply (1.2) and summarising (1.3).

1.1. Austin's objections to Ayer's position

According to Austin, Ayer makes a distinction 'between 'perceptions' which are 'qualitatively delusive' and 'existentially delusive.' (Austin, 1962, p. 78). In a case of quantitative delusion, 'something is or might be supposed to have a characteristic which it does not really have'. (Austin, 1962, p. 80). An example is when we look through a dark blue glass at an object which is not blue: it looks blue, but it isn't really blue. In existential delusion, however, 'something is or might be taken to exist when it does not really exist at all', an example being a mirage in the desert. (Austin, 1962, p. 80). One thinks one sees an oasis, but, in fact, the oasis does not exist at all. Ayer focuses on the former, the 'qualitatively delusive' perceptions, and he 'undertakes as his major enterprise to 'furnish an explanation of the use of the word "real" as it is applied to the characteristics of material things'.' (Austin, 1962, p. 80).

The criterion by which we distinguish the real characteristics of material things from the apparent ones is that the real ones 'occur 'in what are conventionally taken to be preferential conditions'... [for example] we say that the 'real shape' is the shape the thing looks at the more moderate range.' (Austin, 1962, p. 81). I don't stand too close to the object, or too far from it. Take another example, 'if I look at an object through dark glasses, it may be hard to tell what colour it will look when I take them off; hence, through dark glasses, we say, it

doesn't look its 'real colour'.' (Austin, 1962, pp. 81-82). It is not the 'real colour' because the preferential conditions are not satisfied. The criterion for distinguishing the real characteristic from the apparent one in the case of a material thing, i.e., how we recognize the 'qualitatively delusive' perceptions, is by being in a position where we perceive these characteristics *in the preferential conditions*.⁷¹

Austin complains that, although Ayer's account of the distinction between what is real and what is not real is not wrong, it is too limited. He has two objections, and they are both concerned with the scope of the application of Ayer's account.

Firstly, Ayer's distinction between 'perceptions' which are 'qualitatively delusive' and 'existentially delusive' 'divides up the topic in a way that leaves a lot of it out.' (Austin, 1962, p. 80). It doesn't cover all the cases where we do distinguish between reality and appearance. For example, it doesn't cover the cases 'in which something is or might be taken *to be* what it isn't really'. (Austin, 1962, p. 80). Austin gives two examples. First, when 'I see a decoy duck and take it for a real duck', and the second, when I think I see a real diamond and it is really a paste diamond. (Austin, 1962, pp. 79-80). These cases, Austin claims, constitute a third category which can't be subsumed under Ayer's two categories. They don't fall under the 'existentially delusive' because I don't take something to exist where nothing exists at all. And they don't fall under the 'qualitatively delusive' because I don't take the thing to have qualities which it doesn't have. Rather, I take the paste diamond to be a real diamond, and I take the decoy duck to be a real duck. In both cases, I take something to be something else. This is not to take something to exist where it doesn't really exist, and it is not to take something to have

⁷¹ I ignore here for brevity's sake some points which Austin criticises in Ayer's account of 'the preferential conditions'.

qualities which it doesn't really possess, and the problem, as Austin sees it, is that Ayer's account doesn't cover these kinds of cases.

Secondly, even for the qualitatively delusive perceptions, Austin thinks that Ayer overlooks the variety of cases. Austin gives this example: 'That's not the real colour of her hair.' Why not? ... because she has dyed her hair.' (Austin, 1962, p. 82). According to Ayer's taxonomy, this is a case of qualitatively delusive perception where we take something to have a characteristic which it doesn't really have: we take the hair to have the colour which it doesn't really have. Whilst Austin concedes that this example falls within this category, he claims that it doesn't conform to Ayer's account for the following reason. Ayer suggests that we need to be in the preferential conditions to distinguish between real characteristics and apparent ones. However, the conditions are totally irrelevant here: however you change the conditions, you won't be able to know if the quality is real or not. Rather, the reason why this is not the real colour of her hair is that she dyed her hair. Ayer's account of the preferential conditions doesn't cover this case of qualitatively delusive perceptions. It is true in some cases of qualitatively delusive perception that the preferential conditions would help us to distinguish between the real quality and that which is not real, but in other cases, such as the dyed hair, those conditions are irrelevant. What is wrong in Ayer's account is that he takes one correct account and generalizes it to all the cases.

Austin explains that, 'what is wrong in principle with Ayer's account of the use of 'real' is just that he is attempting to give *one* account - or two, if we include his perfunctory remarks on the 'existentially' delusive... Just why it is a mistake to look for any single, quite general account of the use of the word 'real' has, I hope, been made clear enough already.' (Austin, 1962, p. 83). According to Austin, then, Ayer has not quite committed the crude mistake that many philosophers make of looking for one constant meaning of the word 'real', but he has made the same broad methodological error. Whilst

Ayer's characterization divides the field into two and then focuses on one type, attempting to give one account, or criterion, by which the real characteristic of material things might be distinguished from the apparent ones, his resulting account is based on inadequate survey of the actual uses in this field of ordinary language. As result, Austin's claim is that Ayer over-generalises, and as a result fails to acknowledge or take account of further distinctions in the way 'real' is used. Ayer's account is therefore limited: it is correct in many cases, but, as a generalisation, it fails.

1.2. Ayer's reply

Ayer seems to acknowledge the problem that Austin identifies. He writes: 'Austin does achieve what seems to be his main purpose of showing how multifarious are the uses to which the word 'real' is put.' (Ayer, 2011, p. 301). However, he claims that the objection has little force. Thus, he accepts that it is true that we use the word to mean different things, and that some of these are not covered by his distinction between 'perceptions' which are 'qualitatively delusive' and 'existentially delusive', but he claims that those which fall outside his distinction are not relevant, because in any particular philosophical investigation the philosopher is concerned only with distinctions 'that are the ones that are relevant to his argument. The fact that he does not deal with distinctions which are not relevant is not a reproach to him.' (Ayer, 2011, pp. 301-302). In his own case, therefore, he claims that even if the case of the dyed hair was not covered, it is not to be taken as a defect in his account because 'I was not concerned with the distinction, also sometimes marked by the word 'real', between the natural and the artificial.' (Ayer, 2011, p. 302).

It seems to me that Ayer's reply is not very convincing. Whilst it is true that if Ayer never intended to give a full account of how to distinguish between 'real' and 'unreal', then there is no inconsistency between the two accounts because Ayer's generalisation is only

partial, and reinforces Austin's contention that further study of ordinary language is necessary if any truly general account is to be attempted. However, if Ayer's main interest was concerned with distinguishing real characteristics from apparent ones for material things, then it seems that the cases that Austin offers, and Ayer seeks to avoid, are extremely relevant. Ayer's stated purpose of giving the criteria by which the overall distinction for material things could be made was not qualified in a way that would allow him to exclude these troublesome cases, and it seems that Austin's criticism is well directed and relevant.⁷²

By validly identifying these finer gradations in the use of 'real' in OL, Austin again demonstrates the danger of being in thrall to the idea that the way in which philosophical problems are solved is to search for a single meaning for a word. In the particular case of Ayer above, it could at least be argued that his over-rapid generalisation may be a result of such a quest, methodologically and empirically blinding him, initially at least, to the approach and examples that Austin offers.

1.3. Conclusions

In the previous chapter we saw that Austin suggests that some words in OL have more than one meaning and often have different but related meanings. He thinks that philosophers tend to look for one meaning of the word, and this is unjustified in OL. In the analysis of Ayer above we have seen an example of this. This further bears out my earlier contention that it is a mistake to see Austin as solely concerned with the compatibility problem, as many OLP interpreters do. The compatibility problem focuses on cases where philosophers say something which we would not say in OL, and Austin's objections to Ayer don't fit with this characterisation. Austin's objection is not that

⁷² See the full account given by Ayer in his original text *The Foundation of Empirical Knowledge*, chapter 24, "Appearance and Reality", Ayer, 1963), pp. 263-273.

what Ayer says is *incompatible* with OL, but rather that it can be portrayed as an attempt to solve the unity problem in which Ayer is looking for just one or two meanings of the word. This approach prevents him from looking in depth OL, where he would find that the word has many different, but related, meanings.⁷³

Now we move to our second example.

2. True

I said in the previous chapter that some words, according to Austin, have different related meanings, and one of the types of word of which this is true is dimension words. The dimension word 'is the most general and comprehensive term in a whole group of terms of the same kind, terms that fulfil the same [semantic] function.' Austin thinks that 'true' is a 'dimension word', in virtue of which it has something in common in all of its uses, what we called the 'abstract meaning'/semantic function, but no one *specific* meaning in all of its contexts or circumstances of use.

According to Austin the semantic function associated with 'true' fulfils the following purpose: 'True' and 'false' are just general labels for a whole dimension of different appraisals which have something or other to do with the relation between what we say and the facts.' (Austin, 1979, pp. 250-251). In addition, he notes that the different terms which belong to the family, and share this semantic function, are quite diverse. Thus, we find within its ambit terms such as 'exaggerated', 'vague', 'bald', 'rough', 'misleading', 'not very good', 'general', 'too concise', 'fair' ... etc. These are the terms which we, in ordinary language, used for the appraisals of utterances. All members

⁷³ For more discussions on Austin's treatment of 'real' see Jonathan Bennett (2011) and Simon Glendinning (2011). The former objects to Austin's characterization of the use of 'real' in many different ways, largely beyond the scope of this thesis. For example, he claims that the word 'real' is never used as an adjectival word, and has many comments on Austin's method. The latter mainly discuss Austin's method in (re)solving philosophical problems.

of the family share the same semantic function, but differ from each other in other aspects and characteristics.

According to Austin, it is rare that we use ‘true’ or ‘false’ in OL. Austin, as we shall see, thinks that ordinary users employ these abstract terms only in logic and mathematics. Instead, in our ordinary use, we tend to pick a member of the family (such as ‘exaggerated’ or ‘vague’) that better represents the particular aspect of truth or falsity appropriate to the situation. Philosophers, however, tend to do the opposite and focus only on the two most abstract terms in their discussions, and ignore the other terms of the family more suited to normal or ordinary cases.⁷⁴

In what follows I will explore the consequences of the claim in Austin’s writings that ‘true’ is a dimension word, and show that this assumption is crucial for a wide range of issues in philosophy of language. Firstly, in 2.1, we will see how Austin’s discussion on ‘true’ as a dimension word plays a central role in his objections both to Ramsey’s redundancy theory of truth and to Strawson’s performative theory of truth. Secondly, in 2.2, I will argue that Austin’s view of ‘true’ as a dimension word plays a central role in introducing his theory of speech acts. Then, in 2.3, we will see the role the same assumption plays in understanding the relation between the two parts of the speech act, the locutionary and the illocutionary. I will show that underestimating the importance of ‘true’ as a dimension word led to what I call the ‘propositional interpretation of locutionary meaning’, which was introduced by Searle and Strawson. I argue instead for a ‘pragmatic interpretation’, which is close to Charles Travis’s reading of Austin. If my reading is accurate, it will clarify Austin’s answer to

⁷⁴ Austin discusses the different terms of the family we use on OL in ‘Performative Utterance’, see Austin, 1979, p. 250; *HDTW*, see Austin, 1975, pp. 122-174 and ‘Truth’ see Austin, 1979, pp. 129-130.

one of the central questions in philosophy of language, the nature of truth, and its relation to meaning.

Throughout all of this it will be clear that failing to pay attention to the different concrete or specific contextual meanings of the less abstract members of the family leads philosophers astray in understanding the role of 'truth' in language.

2.1. Strawson and Austin on 'truth'

I will start by setting out the redundancy theory of 'truth', which both Austin and Strawson discuss, before explaining Strawson's own theory. I then outline Austin's objection to both theories, based on his regarding 'truth' as a dimension word. Finally, I examine Strawson's rejoinder, and show it to be unsatisfactory.

Both Austin and Strawson reject the redundancy theory of 'truth', which states the following: '[I]n all sentences of the form 'p is true' the phrase 'is true' is logically superfluous'. (Austin, 1979, p. 125). What exactly is meant by logically superfluous here? Ramsey explains: 'it is evident that "it is true that Caesar was murdered" means no more than that Caesar was murdered'. (Ramsey, 1927, p. 157). Whenever I say 'it is true that P', or 'P is true', 'it is true that ...' or '... is true' is redundant, because we can just say 'P'. 'It is true...' doesn't add anything.

Austin and Strawson, however, react differently to the redundancy theory. Rather than rejecting the theory wholesale, Strawson sees himself as developing its main insight. Austin, on the other hand, thinks that the theory is wrong and argues that both the redundancy theory itself and Strawson's development of it are flawed. I will start with Strawson's view.

Strawson thinks that the redundancy theory 'is right in asserting that to say that a statement is true is not to make a further statement; but wrong in suggesting that to say that a statement is true is not to do something different from, or additional to, just making the statement.' (Strawson, 1949, p. 84). He thus accepts that 'is true' doesn't assert anything, nor does it make any statement, in addition to P, and he uses this aspect of the redundancy theory to attack what he calls 'the semantic theory of truth'.

The semantic theory states that 'to say that a statement is true is to make a statement about a sentence of a given language'. (Strawson, 1949, p. 83). When I say 'P is true', I talk about the sentence P, and I make a statement about this statement (or sentence). In that sense, according to the theory, 'is true' is used to assert P. Strawson concurs with the redundancy theory in denying this. For him, in saying 'it is true that P' or 'P is true', 'is true' doesn't make any assertion about P.

However, Strawson disagrees with the redundancy theory, and claims that 'is true' has a role and is neither logically superfluous nor redundant. He thinks that 'in using such expressions ['it is true that...' or '... is true'] we are confirming, underwriting, admitting, agreeing with, what somebody has said ; but ... we are not making any assertion additional to theirs ; and are *never* using 'is true' to talk *about* something which is *what they said*, or the sentences they used in saying it.' (Strawson, 1949, p. 93).

What Strawson therefore takes from the redundancy theory is the following. When I say 'P is true', I don't make any other assertion, or statement, except that P. I call this 'claim A'. On the other hand, although I don't make an assertion, or a statement, about P, I do something else by saying 'P is true': I express my agreement with what has been said. I call this 'claim B'.

Austin discusses both claims A and B. Here, my analysis will focus on Austin's rejection of claim A, with the discussion of claim B and Austin's ultimate denial that such a sharp distinction between the two claims can be drawn postponed until section 2.2.

In 'Truth' (1950)⁷⁵, where he replies to Strawson's 'Truth' (1949), Austin promotes a version of 'correspondence theory of truth'. He makes the observation that 'true' is a dimension word to support this theory. 'True', as a dimension word, is the most abstract term in the family, and all the terms in the family 'true' assess the relation between what is said and the world and are part of the family of 'true' in their own particular way.

'Claim A' is that 'is true' is not used to assess the relation between the words and the world, and that 'is true' is never used for making an assertion about what is said. Austin complains that to say 'is true' is not used to make any assertion about P overlooks the role of 'true' as a dimension word. He explains that '[T]here are numerous other adjectives which are in the same class as 'true' and 'false', which are concerned... with the relations between the words...and the world, and which nevertheless no one would dismiss as logically superfluous.' (Austin, 1979, p. 129). For example, a 'certain statement is exaggerated or vague or bald, a description somewhat rough or misleading or not very good, an account rather general or too concise.' (Austin, 1979, p. 129). All these terms are used to assess the relation between the words and the world, and none of them is superfluous. 'True' is just another term in the family, and it is used to assert what is said, just like any of these terms is used to assess the relation between what is said and the world, in different ways. For Austin, to say 'is true' is superfluous' overlooks the fact that that 'true' is part of the family. For him, there can be no justification in singling out one

⁷⁵ For clarity, all references to this article are to Austin's 3rd edition of *Philosophical Papers* (1979).

term in the family for special treatment and asserting that it is superfluous, or that it is not used to make an assertions about what is said, or that it is not used to assess the relation between the words and the world, when it is clear that all the other members of the family could not be so treated.

Thus, in Austin's view, 'true', in virtue of being a dimension word, and in virtue of being a member of a family words within that dimension, has the right to be treated in precisely the same way as any other member of the family. As a result, he believes that 'claim A' is wrong, and that 'is true' *is* used to assess the relation between the words and the world.

Strawson responds to Austin's position in his paper 'Truth' (1950). His reply is complex, but for present purposes I will focus on his rejection of Austin's claim that 'true' is a dimension word. In this context, Strawson writes, '[N]ot all the words taken by Austin as likely to help us to be clear about "true" are in the same class as one another. "Exaggerated" is, of those he mentions, the one most relevant to his thesis... Being "over-concise" and "too general" are not ways of being "not quite true." These obviously relate to the specific purposes of specific makings of statements; to the unsatisfied wishes of specific audiences... Whether the statement (that *p*) is true or false is a matter of the way things are (of whether *p*); whether a statement is exaggerated (if the question arises – which depends on the type of statement and the possibilities of the language) is a matter of the way things are (*e.g.*, of whether or not there were fewer than 2,000 there). But whether a statement is over-concise or too general depends on what the hearer wants to know.' (Strawson, 1950, p. 152).

In other words, according to Strawson, Austin is mistaken in taking all these terms to belong to the family. While some terms, such as 'true', 'false' and 'exaggerated' depend on how things are (whether P or not), other terms, such as 'too concise' or 'too general', depend on 'the

specific purposes of specific makings of statements', not only on how things are. The two sets of terms are not in the same class, and so, according to Strawson, they don't belong to the same family, and the argument from 'true' as a dimension word therefore fails. The key issue is that Strawson takes being true or false as a matter of 'whether P', *independent of* the 'purposes of specific makings of statements; to the unsatisfied [or satisfied] wishes of specific audiences.' He claims that these features don't enter in our consideration of whether an utterance is true or false. Austin's mistake is to confuse the two sets of features and place them all in one class.⁷⁶

In order to assess Strawson's criticism, it will be helpful to focus on a specific example from Austin. The example Austin gives is 'the galaxy is the shape of a fried egg', and he encourages us to ask whether this statement is true or false. His view is that we can't tell if this statement is 'true' or 'false' independent of the purpose of making it and its audience. Instead, we have to take into account the very considerations which Strawson thinks are irrelevant for such a judgement. Thus, if the context and audience are such that a rough or approximate similarity will suffice, such as might occur in a discussion with young children about shapes of different star systems, then we may agree that the statement is 'true'. Similarly, if we were talking to an astrophysicist who would base a number of precise calculations on our answer, we will almost certainly have to reply that the statement is 'false'.

I find this example persuasive, and I think it illustrates an additional aspect of Austin's argument that further supports his underlying claim

⁷⁶ Note that Strawson changes his mind in 'Truth' (1950) in relation to 'claim A': 'It will be clear that, in common with Mr. Austin, I reject the thesis that the phrase "is true" is logically superfluous, together with the thesis that to say that a proposition is true is *just* to assert it and to say that it is false is *just* to assert its contradictory. "True" and "not true" have jobs of their own to do... In using them, we are not just asserting that X is Y or that X is not Y. We are asserting this in a way in which we could not assert it unless certain conditions were fulfilled; we may also be granting, denying, confirming, etc.' (Strawson, 1950, p. 147).

that 'true' is a dimension word. As we have seen above, we are able to answer the question concerning the truth of the claim if we are given sufficient context, and this seems clearly to refute Strawson's claim that 'true' or 'false' are decided independent of context. In addition, it seems equally clear that, in ordinary language, we would indicate any contextually determined lack of precision by using a more specific word from within Austin's putative family of words in the 'true' dimension. Thus, in the circumstances of discussing the shapes of star systems with small children, we might well say that the galaxy is 'like', or 'roughly' the shape of a fried egg. This seems to indicate that the range of words Austin's 'true' dimension can be used, from the abstract through to the concrete, depend on the purpose, audience and context of the utterance. This fits precisely with Austin's description of the way in which a dimension word works set out in the previous chapter: the context-independent abstract level (in this case 'true') is generally too thin to carry the burden of expressing specific semantic meaning, hence its substitution in specific circumstances by the sorts of words Austin lists. However, the dimension word, in virtue of being the most abstract representation, *can* in principle substitute for any of the specific words in its family, but it is clear from these examples that its effectiveness in conveying meaning in such circumstances will be limited.

It therefore seems that it is not the case that being 'true' or 'false' has nothing to do with the 'purposes of specific makings of statements; to the unsatisfied [or satisfied] wishes of specific audiences.' Austin argues that 'true' is a dimension word, and that all the terms of its family are used to assess the relation between the words and the world, and it is subject to the purposes and intentions of the speaker, the audience to which it is directed, the circumstances under which it is uttered...etc. This is Austin's version of the 'correspondence theory of truth'. It is mainly a version which takes the different dimensions and degrees of correspondence to be crucial to understanding the job the word 'true' does in OL. These dimensions and degrees change

according to the context and circumstances under which we utter our words.

2.2. The performative/constative distinction and its collapse

Austin's claim that 'true' is a dimension word was clearly central to his theory of truth, but also had important ramifications for his wider philosophy. In particular, it influenced the development of his theory of speech acts, ultimately forcing him to abandon his criticism of what he called the 'descriptive fallacy' by showing that his distinction between performatives and constatives, on which his position relied, was unsound.

Understanding precisely how he came to this insight is important, and I will claim that commentators in general misunderstand Austin's position. In particular, I will show that the idea that there is continuity between the distinction between performatives and constatives, on one hand, and the later distinction between the locutionary and illocutionary acts, on the other, is mistaken. I will explain in detail how this misunderstanding arises in 2.2, before arguing, in 2.3, that there is no such continuity, and that the correct understanding of the relation between the two distinctions plays a vital role in both choosing between two interpretations of Austin's theory of speech acts, and understanding his theory of truth and meaning.

In his earlier writings, such as 'Other Minds' and 'Truth', Austin proposes that we can distinguish between 'performatives' and 'statements'. I will call this the 'constative/performative doctrine'. In *HTDW*, 'Performative Utterances' and 'Performatives-Constatives', however, Austin later finds that the distinction is instable, because 'truth' is a dimension word, and he comes to realize that a new theory of speech acts is needed. In what follows, I trace his thought through this development.

2.2.1. *The descriptive fallacy and the constative/performative distinction*

According to Austin, philosophers used to take every utterance of the declarative grammatical form (an utterance which is a not question, command... etc.) to describe states of affairs, or report or state facts. As a result, they thought that they must be either true or false.⁷⁷ Other utterances, which don't take the declarative mood, such as questions or commands, are not 'true' or 'false'. Let us call utterances which are either true or false 'statements'. However, says Austin, 'it has come to be realized that many utterances which have been taken to be statements (merely because they are not, on grounds of grammatical form, to be classed as commands, questions, &c.) are not in fact descriptive, nor susceptible of being true or false.' (Austin, 1979, p. 131). Austin observes that an utterance, which takes the declarative mood, is not a statement 'when it is a formula in a calculus: when it is a performatory utterance: when it is a value-judgement: when it is a definition: when it is part of a work of fiction'. (Austin, 1979, p. 131). These are different kinds of utterances: they take the declarative mode, but are not descriptive.

The descriptive fallacy, then, is the fallacy of taking all utterances of the declarative mood to be descriptive, to be statements, and to be either true or false. One such kind of utterance is the 'performative'.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Austin discusses the descriptive fallacy in a number of different places: see Austin, 1979, pp. 97-103, pp. 130-132 and pp. 233-234; and Austin, 1975, pp. 1-4 and p. 100.

⁷⁸ Austin is part of the history of the unmasking of the descriptive fallacy. He is not the first to do so, but he takes himself to deepen the insight that not all declarative sentences are descriptive. It is important to see how Austin himself sees the connections between his work and previous philosophers, such as Kant, and logical positivists. See Austin, 1975, pp. 1-4, and Austin, 1979, pp. 233-235.

Here we might draw an analogy between the sentences and the words. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Austin rejects the claim that all words 'refer' to things,

According to Austin, the distinction between performatives and constatives is as follows.⁷⁹ Constatives are utterances which are either true or false. For example, when you state something, or describe something, or report something, your utterance is either true or false.⁸⁰ Take for example 'the cat is on the mat'. This is a declarative sentence, which is descriptive. It describes how things are, and it is true or false, if the states of affairs are, or are not, as it states.

In uttering a performative, on the other hand, I do not describe a state of affairs, or report something, and my utterance cannot be taken to be true or false. Instead, I *do* something. For example, in a marriage ceremony, when I say 'I do', 'I am not reporting on a marriage: I am indulging in it' (Austin, 1975, p. 6); or when in some official ceremony I am supposed to name a ship, I say, 'I name this ship the Queen Elizabeth'; or when I say 'I bet you sixpence it will rain tomorrow'. Other examples include: 'I promise that ...' and 'I apologize'. Thus, in uttering a performative we get married, or name something, or promise, or apologize. What we say is not true or false, and we don't state, or describe, or report anything. We do something else.

and he rejects that all declarative sentences describe states of affairs. In both, Austin attacks what we might call the 'referential picture of language'.

⁷⁹ In the three later works mentioned above, *HTDW*, 'Performative Utterances' and 'Performatives-Constatives', Austin examines the distinction before declaring that it is not working. Most of what follows depends on the characterization of the distinction as it appears in the major work, *HTDW*, Austin (1975).

⁸⁰ Austin in (1975) was suspicious of the two terms: 'descriptive fallacy' and 'statements', 'perhaps this is not a good name, as 'descriptive' itself is special. Not all true or false statements are descriptions, and for this reason I prefer to use the word 'Constative'.' (Austin, 1975, p. 3). The point is this: the fallacy takes all utterances of the affirmative grammatical form as either true or false. The utterances which are either true or false are 'constatives'. Austin was led to see that there is a problem in lumping all these terms, such as stating, describing, reporting...etc. under the heading 'descriptive' or 'statement'. See 'How to Talk', where Austin tries to give an account of the differences between these different terms. We need a term to describe what seems to be either true or false, and 'Constative' is the one Austin used in his major work, *HTDW* (1975).

However, simply uttering a performative is not sufficient to constitute the specific act, as can be seen in the cases above. Saying a few words is not marrying: ‘The words have to be said in the appropriate circumstances.’ (Austin, 1979, p. 236). One way to highlight this dependence on appropriate circumstances is to consider how we might *fail* in doing the act. For example, if I am married already, then saying ‘I do’ in the ceremony, will not make me married. If I am not the person who was chosen to name the ship, then saying ‘I name this ship...’ fails: the ship was not named, even though I uttered the words; and if no one wants to bet me, then I haven’t bet anyone. In each of these situations something goes wrong because some factor in the context is inappropriate. In such circumstances, according to Austin, the act is ‘to some extent a failure: the utterance is then, we may say, not indeed false but in general *unhappy*’. (Austin, 1975, p. 133).

However, in the next section we will see that there is some tension inherent in the constative/performative distinction which becomes apparent in Austin’s reply to Strawson.

2.2.2. *A problem in the distinction - background*

In 2.1, we saw that Austin rejects claim A on the grounds of ‘true’ being a dimension word. However, it is his discussion of claim B that leads to the realisation that the distinction between performatives and constatives may be unstable. To see precisely how this comes about, it is necessary to understand the background to Strawson’s claim B.

The historical account of Austin-Strawson debate is important. The debate is initiated by Austin’s paper ‘Other Minds’ (1946), which introduces the descriptive fallacy and the constative / performatives distinction. This is followed by Strawson’s ‘Truth’ (1949), which elaborates Austin’s distinction and applies it to ‘truth’, and then finally we have both Austin’s ‘Truth’ (1950), and Strawson’s reply ‘Truth’ (1950).

Strawson introduces his theory of truth in 'Truth' (1949), as an elaboration of Austin's distinction between performatives and constatives. According to Strawson, 'the phrase 'is true' is not descriptive at all.' (Strawson, 1949, p. 94). He explains that the source of the problematic accounts of 'truth' which he finds in the literature 'is the ancient prejudice that any indicative sentence is, or makes, a statement.' (Strawson, 1949, p. 94). In other words, that all declarative sentences are descriptive: what Austin calls the descriptive fallacy. Strawson suggests that there are other uses of declarative sentences, which he calls 'performatory', taking this term from Austin's 'Other Minds', as opposed to 'descriptive', 'assertive'... etc.⁸¹

According to Strawson, 'the phrase 'is true' can sometimes be replaced, without any important change in meaning, by some such phrase as "I confirm it", which is performatory...'⁸² (Strawson, 1949, p. 95). For Strawson, the prejudice, or the fallacy, is to take every indicative sentence as descriptive, assertive, etc. whereas, in fact, some utterances of the declarative mood are not descriptive. Just as Austin says that 'I promise' and 'I know' are not descriptive but performative, so, according to Strawson, 'is true' isn't descriptive or assertive: instead, it shows that I confirm something, agree with it...etc.

Strawson's theory takes its name 'the performative theory of truth' from that idea, that in uttering 'is true' we perform something: we agree or confirm what someone has said. This is what I called claim B.

⁸¹ Austin suggests that 'I know such and such' and 'I promise' are performative, and not descriptive. See Austin, 1979, pp. 98-103.

⁸² In both papers, Austin (1946) and Strawson (1949), the promise is that we would know something about 'truth' and 'knowledge' by seeing that 'I know...' and 'P is true' are not descriptive but performative. For a criticism of both, see Searle's influential criticism in Searle (1962) and Searle (1969). For a recent attempt to defend Austin and Strawson see Avner Baz (2012): chapters 1 and 2.

In his analysis of Strawson's theory, Austin agrees with 'claim B'. He says: 'I agree that to say that ST [statement is true] 'is' very often, and according to the all-important linguistic occasion, to confirm tstS [the statement that S] or to grant it or what not.' (Austin, 1979, p. 133). However, he adds, 'but this cannot show that to say that ST [Statement is true] is not also and at the same time to make an assertion about tstS [the statement that S].' (Austin, 1979, p. 133). Austin argues, as we have seen in 2.1, that 'is true' *is* used to make an assertion about P, and therefore he rejects claim A.

He explains that '[I]t is common for quite ordinary statements to have a performatory 'aspect': to say that you are a cuckold may be to insult you, but it is also and at the same time to make a statement which is true or false.' (Austin, 1979, p. 133). Austin thus agrees with Strawson that there is a performative aspect to 'is true', but, unlike Strawson, he also thinks that there is a descriptive aspect.

2.2.3. *The collapse of the distinction*

Perhaps part of the problem in interpreting Austin on this matter stems from a lack of clarity in his exposition of the relation between constatives and performatives. In the same paper, 'Truth', Austin says that 'many utterances which have been taken to be statements...are not in fact descriptive, nor susceptible of being true or false.' (Austin, 1979, p. 131). He gives some examples, performatives being one⁸³. However, in his criticism of Strawson's claim B, he states that it is common for statements to have a performatory aspect. The utterance 'you are a cuckold' is both: it is performative, to insult you, and it is descriptive, it is a statement, which is either true or false.

The difficulty is that this position seems inconsistent: on the one hand Austin seems to be denying performatives the capability to indicate truth or falsehood, but, on the other, he seems to grant this ability. As

⁸³ See Austin, 1979, p. 133.

a result, the fundamental distinction between performatives and constatives seems to be threatened, and Austin himself quickly realises this.

In particular, he recognises that for both kinds of utterances we often appraise the relation between the words and the world in the same way, using the same family of terms which belong to the dimension of 'truth'. Any utterance is appraised in relation to both the appropriate circumstances under which it is uttered, and the facts which the utterance somehow 'corresponds' to. Thus, constatives are assessed (being true or false) in relation to facts, as is the 'happiness' of some performatives: we estimate rightly or wrongly; we find correctly or incorrectly; we argue soundly; we advise well; we judge fairly; we blame justifiably. In all these cases, our assessment relies on the facts: 'the question always arises whether the praise, blame, or congratulation was merited or unmerited'. (Austin, 1975, p. 141).

Equally, 'such adverbs as 'rightly', 'wrongly', 'correctly', and 'incorrectly' are used with statements too.' (Austin, 1975, p. 141). All this makes us question the original distinction between two kinds of utterances, constatives which are merely true or false and correspond to facts, and performatives, which were thought not to be true or false in virtue of neither describing nor stating things, and therefore did not correspond to facts. As a result, Austin asks 'Can we be sure that stating truly is a different class of assessment from arguing soundly, advising well, judging fairly, and blaming justifiably? Do these [performatives] not have something to do in complicated ways with facts?' (Austin, 1975, p. 142). In assessing a performative to be happy or unhappy, using the adjectives above, '[F]acts come in as our knowledge or opinion about facts.' (Austin, 1975, p. 142). In other words, the happiness or unhappiness of performatives, which originally were thought to be independent of the facts, turns out to be related to facts, as are constatives.

A similar difficulty arises when we consider constatives, whose truth values were originally thought to be independent of the circumstances of uttering the words. Austin gives the following example. 'Suppose that we confront 'France is hexagonal' with the facts, in this case, I suppose, with France, is it true or false? Well, if you like, up to a point; of course I can see what you mean by saying that it is true for certain intents and purposes.' (Austin, 1975, p. 143). According to Austin, it is a 'rough description'. But we can't simply assess if it is true or false. Thus, 'it is good enough for a general top-ranking general, but not for a geographer'. (Austin, 1975, p. 143). It is difficult to see how we can say it is true or false, without taking the circumstances of uttering it into account. Take another example: 'Lord Raglan won the battle of Alma'. This is good enough for a school book, but not for a historical research. More examples from 'Truth' include: 'Belfast is north of London', 'the galaxy is the shape of fried egg'.⁸⁴ In all these cases, it seems that we can't tell if the statement is true or false without taking into account the circumstances under which it was uttered.

The upshot of this is that the distinction between performatives and constatives collapses. The distinction was supposed to show us that we have on one hand utterances which are true or false, which corresponds to the facts and are independent of the circumstances of utterance, and on the other hand, utterances which are not true or false, and are assessed according to the circumstances under which they are uttered. The above examination shows us that both kinds of utterances are often related both to facts and to the circumstances under which they uttered, and that they are both assessed in similar ways. And the key reason for this, according to Austin, is his view of 'truth' as a dimension word. The terms which we use in assessing the performatives overlap with the terms we use in assessing constatives: we use the same family of words to describe and assess both

⁸⁴ See the discussion above in 2.1 on the last example.

performatives and constatives. Austin concludes '[W]hen a constative is confronted with the facts, we in fact appraise it in ways involving the employment of a vast array of terms which overlap with those that we use in the appraisal of performatives.' (Austin, 1975, pp. 142-143).

2.3. Austin's theory of speech acts and the role of 'truth'

The failure of the distinction between 'performatives' and 'constatives' prompted Austin to propose a new theory of speech acts. His key idea was that in analysing utterances we should distinguish between a *locutionary* act and an *illocutionary* act.

The locutionary act is 'the utterance of certain noises, the utterance of certain words in a certain construction, and the utterance of them with a certain 'meaning'...'. (Austin, 1975, p. 94). This contrasts with the illocutionary act. As Austin puts it: 'To determine what illocutionary act is so performed we must determine in what way we are using the locution:

'asking or answering a question,
giving some information or an assurance or a warning,
announcing a verdict or an intention,
pronouncing a sentence,
making an appointment or an appeal or a criticism,
making an identification or giving a description,
and the numerous like.' (Austin, 1975, pp. 98-99).

What we have here, then, is a new theory which distinguishes between two acts. Every utterance⁸⁵ possesses a 'locutionary act' and an 'illocutionary act', or what Austin sometimes calls 'meaning' and

⁸⁵ Actually, *almost* every utterance: 'whenever I 'say' anything (except perhaps a mere exclamation like 'damn' or 'ouch') I shall be performing both locutionary and illocutionary acts.' (Austin, 1979, p. 133).

‘force’ respectively.⁸⁶ Thus, for example, we distinguish between the meaning of the utterance: ‘Shoot her!’, and the force of that utterance, which depends on the circumstances but could consist in urging, or advising, or ordering me to shoot her.⁸⁷

Precisely how to interpret this distinction, and how it relates to ‘truth’ is disputed, and in what follows I will discuss two interpretations, concluding that one of them seems to be more compatible with Austin’s text. The first interpretation I call the ‘propositional interpretation’, following Strawson, and the second the ‘pragmatic view’, following Charles Travis.

The propositional interpretation states the following: The locutionary meaning is to be identified with what was known as ‘constative’, or ‘statement’ or ‘proposition’. The idea is that there is part of the speech act which corresponds to the facts, and which is to be ‘true’ or ‘false’. This part of speech act is the locutionary aspect.

The pragmatic view, as I characterise it, states that what is true or false is the whole speech act. Whilst there is a distinction to be made between ‘meaning’ and ‘force’, between the locutionary and illocutionary parts, ‘meaning’ is not to be identified with what is true or false. I will argue that the crucial role of ‘truth’ as a dimension word will support the second interpretation.

⁸⁶ Note that Austin gives a technical sense to both ‘meaning’ and ‘force’. ‘Admittedly we can use ‘meaning’ also with reference to illocutionary force- ‘He meant it as an order’, &c. But I want to distinguish *force* and meaning.’ (Austin, 1975, p. 100).

⁸⁷ The example is from Austin, 1975, pp.101-102.

2.3.1. *The Searle-Strawson interpretation: locutionary meaning and truth.*

Searle and Strawson both suggest that, for Austin, the locutionary meaning is the part of the utterance which is either true or false. Let us start with Searle. What is the distinction between locutionary and illocutionary acts? Searle writes: ‘Austin may have had in mind the distinction between the content or, as some philosophers call it, the proposition... and the force or illocutionary type of the act. Thus, for example, the proposition that I will leave may be a common content of different utterances with different illocutionary forces, for I can threaten, warn, state, predict, or promise that I will leave. ... the same propositional act can occur in all sorts of different illocutionary acts.’ (Searle, 1973, p. 155). It seems to me that Austin would agree with this characterization of the distinction so far. As we have seen above, ‘shoot her’ might be taken as advising, ordering, urging...etc, and these are different illocutionary forces, but the ‘content’, ‘the proposition’, the ‘locutionary meaning’, is the same in all of them. However, I will argue that Austin would not agree with what follows.

Searle continues, ‘it is the proposition which involves "correspondence with the facts."... Propositions ... can be true or false.’ (Searle, 1973, pp. 158-159). Searle then takes the content, the locutionary meaning, to be the part which is either true or false.

Strawson has a similar view. He suggests the following interpretation of the locutionary meaning. ‘Propositions... are supposed to be bearers of truth-value... On any view, propositions may be expressed by parts of utterances... parts which are not themselves advanced with the force which belongs to the utterance as a whole; and it may be expedient to ... [replace]... the term ‘propositions’... with one less general. For the purpose Austin’s own term ‘constative’ offers itself as a convenient candidate’. (Strawson, 1973, pp. 59-61). Strawson suggests that we can abstract from the whole utterance the locutionary

meaning, and separate it from the force. The locutionary meaning is the proposition, or the constative, and is what is true or false.

It is important to note that Searle and Strawson don't claim that they are just giving an interpretation to Austin's distinction: according to them, Austin himself is not completely clear about the distinction. For them, there is something in Austin's discussion which supports their 'propositional interpretation', but there are other parts which don't. In analysing their position, I will start, in 2.3.2, with the elements in Austin's text which they think support their reading. I will argue that their reading of Austin is not very convincing, because they don't take into account his clear view that 'true' is a dimension word. Then, in 2.3.3, I will address the part in Austin's text which Searle thinks doesn't support his reading. I will show that this may be based on a misunderstanding in reading Austin's views on 'truth'.⁸⁸ My claim will be that taking proper account of the nature of 'true' as a dimension word leads to the view that what is true or false is the whole speech act, and not any single part of it.

2.3.2. The constative/performative and locutionary/illocutionary distinctions

I said above that Searle and Strawson find indications in Austin's account of locutionary meaning which encourage them to adopt the propositional interpretation. This largely consists in what they take to be continuity between, on the one hand, the distinction between performatives and constatives, and, on the other, that between the locutionary and the illocutionary.

Austin comments on the relation between the two distinctions as follows. 'With the constative utterance, we abstract from the

⁸⁸ Both Searle and Strawson change their minds about the issue, in different places and at different times. I examine here only their direct discussion of Austin.

illocutionary ... aspects of the speech act, and we concentrate on the locutionary... With the performative utterance, we attend as much as possible to the illocutionary force of the utterance, and abstract from the dimension of correspondence with facts.' (Austin, 1975, pp. 145-146). Both Strawson and Searle cite this remark to motivate their reading⁸⁹, and, taken in isolation, it perhaps seems reasonable to infer that Austin's view is that the locutionary meaning is the heir of the constative, what is true or false, and the illocutionary force is the heir of the performative, doing something like arguing, stating, warning... etc.

However, on the same page Austin also writes:

'Perhaps neither of these abstractions [constative as focusing on the locutionary, and performative as focusing on the illocutionary] is so very expedient: perhaps we have here not really two poles, but rather an historical development. Now in certain cases, perhaps with mathematical formulas in physics books as examples of constatives, or with the issuing of simple executive orders or the giving of simple names, say, as examples of performatives, we approximate in real life to finding such things. It was examples of this kind, like 'I apologize', and 'The cat is on the mat', said for no conceivable reason, extreme marginal cases, that gave rise to the idea of two distinct utterances.' (Austin, 1975, p. 146).

Austin here makes explicit the instability of the distinction between constatives and performatives that I identified at the end of 2.2. Whilst there are extreme cases where the distinction is clear, the vast majority of constatives and performatives fail to conform to this strict interpretation, and Austin, instead, seems to argue precisely for

⁸⁹ See Strawson, 1973, p. 53, and Searle, 1973, p. 155.

making a break with the very notion of such a distinction in practice.⁹⁰ It is on the basis of this realisation that Austin wants to introduce his new theory of speech acts, the collapse of the old distinction having been driven, as we saw earlier, by the recognition that ‘true’ is a dimension word, and that we use the same family of words to appraise both kinds of utterances.

The strange thing about Searle and Strawson’s reading (apart from failing to place in context the quotation on which they rely) is that it seems to fall back into the same problem that led Austin to move away from the constative/performative distinction and propose the new speech act theory. In particular, it seems that Austin recognises that at the heart of the collapse of the distinction is the realisation that we can’t separate the two categories by appealing to two distinct notions of appraisal: true/false and happy/unhappy. However, if the locutionary act is not strictly heir to the constative, what is it in an utterance which can be validly appraised as being ‘true’ or ‘false’?

I claim that the most plausible reading of Austin’s position is that being true or false is to be assessed in relation to a whole speech act, and not any part of it. This position is consistent with the moral of the

⁹⁰ Regarding the view that there are cases where the truth of what is said is not related to the circumstances under which the utterance is issued, and that Austin accepts that in *some case* this is valid, see the following. Travis in ‘Truth and Merit’ (2011) suggests that there might be reconciliation between two views on ‘truth’. And maybe the first one which he attributes to Frege, which doesn’t take into account the circumstances, is valid for some cases, while Austin’s view is valid in others. A similar suggestion is to be found in Warnock, 1989, pp. 59-61. I agree with these readings. But the issues would be beyond the context of this reading. It seems to me that Austin, in this very compressed remark, doesn’t make distinctions between two cases which he says reach the ‘ideal’ of ‘constatives’ and ‘performatives’: First, the cases in mathematics and logic, where the circumstances under which the utterance is issued are not important. Second, the ‘marginal cases’ in OL, where we reach the two extremes. And then there is also a third issue regarding the notion of ‘historical development’, where it seems that he suggests that language was first used as pure ‘performative’ or pure ‘constatives’ and later developed into the current mixture of both. These are clearly three different issues that cannot be fully explored here. However, the key point for present purposes is that although, on rare occasions, the ideal conceptions of the two terms can be validly employed, the vast majority of utterances are not polarised in this way.

collapse of the first distinction, where we had to take into account that the terms of assessment of 'true' and 'false' merged and overlapped with terms of assessments of 'happy' and 'unhappy'. The lesson there was that both types of assessment generally depended on, and were determined by, both facts *and* circumstances of utterance.

Finally, let me clarify one aspect of my objection to the propositional reading. The problem with identifying the locutionary meaning as that which is true or false is that it treats it as a 'proposition' which is to be appraised as true or false *regardless of the circumstances under which it is uttered*. Whilst I take Austin to agree with Searle, as we have seen in 2.3.1, that the locutionary meaning might be shared by different speech acts and that it is something which we abstract from those different speech acts, Searle identifies the locutionary meaning with what is true or false, whereas I argue that Austin doesn't. If Searle is right, then the locutionary meaning, which we abstract from different speech acts, can by itself - and independently of being uttered under specific circumstances, since it is abstracted from the actual circumstances under which it is uttered - be true or false. This is precisely the opposite of what I have tried to show for Austin: that the circumstances under which we utter the words is vital for applying the terms of the 'truth' family.

And this account is symmetrical with Austin's account of dimension words, and truth in particular. Whilst, in extreme cases, the abstract component of the dimension word can be used on its own without reference to the circumstances of use, in almost every normal case the abstract element is too weak to be used and, instead, other words in the same family are employed, words which better reflect the context.

In summary, I argue that Searle and Strawson's account is not compatible with Austin's text, and that, in the general case, it is the whole speech act which is to be judged 'true' or 'false'. This does not deny that there is a relation between the constative/performative

distinction and the locutionary/illocutionary distinction. Indeed, Austin himself thinks that there is such a relation: '[T]he doctrine of the performative/constative distinction stands to the doctrine of locutionary and illocutionary acts in the total speech act as the special theory to the general theory.' (Austin, 1975, p. 148). However, as I have shown, Austin doesn't think that the locutionary meaning is the heir of the constative in the crucial sense that it is not what is true or false.

However, Searle has a further line of attack.

2.3.3. Searle's second reading of Austin's theory of truth

Searle says that he wants to examine 'one of Austin's most important discoveries, the discovery that constatives are illocutionary acts as well as performatives, or, in short, the discovery that statements are speech acts.' (Searle, 1973, p. 157). It is true, as Searle explains, that Austin in the new theory regards stating, describing, arguing, warning...etc., as illocutionary forces. 'Stating, describing, &c., are just two names among a very great many others for illocutionary acts...' (Austin, 1975, pp. 148-149). It is this discovery, however, with which Searle in fact agrees, that Searle identifies as the source of the mistakes in Austin's theory of truth.

Searle starts by explaining that 'statement' 'is structurally ambiguous.' (Searle, 1973, p. 157). It has two meanings: "'Statement" can mean either the act of stating or what is stated.' (Searle, 1973, p. 157). He calls the former 'statement-acts', which are illocutionary acts, and the latter 'statement-objects', which are the propositions/locutionary meanings stated. According to him, the distinction helps us to identify what is 'true' or 'false' clearly: 'Propositions but not acts can be true or false; thus statement-objects but not statement-acts can be true or false.' (Searle, 1973, p. 159). It is the statement-object, the proposition, and not the illocutionary act of stating, Searle claims, which is to be identified as what is 'true' or 'false'.

Austin, Searle thinks, has confused the two: '[T]he failure to take into account the structural ambiguity of 'statement' ... had very important consequences... For since statements are [illocutionary] speech acts, and since statements [the statement-objects, the propositions] can be true or false, it appears that that which is true or false is a [illocutionary] speech act. But this inference is fallacious, as it involves a fallacy of ambiguity...And the view that it is the act of stating which is true or false is one of the most serious weaknesses of Austin's theory of truth.' (Searle, 1973, p. 157). Searle concludes, 'Statement-acts are illocutionary acts of stating. Statement-objects are propositions ... The latter but not the former can be true or false. And it is the confusion between these which prevented Austin from seeing ... [that illocutionary] acts cannot have truth values.' (Searle, 1973, p. 159). For Searle, it is the locutionary meaning / the proposition/ the statement-object which is true or false. Austin was mistaken in taking the illocutionary act of stating to be true or false because Austin confused the act of stating with what is stated.

I find this reading problematic for two reasons. Firstly, Austin uses the term 'constatives' rather than 'statements' in his later writings, such as his major work on speech acts, *HTDW*. It therefore makes it difficult to understand the suggestion that he equivocates on the term 'statements' in his argument. Indeed, it seems from Austin's reservations of the terms used to designate what is true or false in the initial distinction he makes, that he was at pains to avoid using terminology that carries any specific traditional philosophical charge, precisely to avoid misleading himself or the reader.

Secondly, Searle's reading does not engage with the idea that for Austin 'true' is a dimension word. This means, as we have seen, that Austin thinks that we apply a family of different terms to appraise the relation between utterances and the world, and that it is therefore the full speech act which is liable to be 'true' or 'false'. In particular, it

seems clear that he believes that the whole speech act is assessed for truth or falsehood, whatever the illocutionary force. In addition, Searle's position here is weak because of the lack of pertinent textual evidence in support of his claim. Although Searle is perfectly right in saying that, for Austin, stating is an illocutionary force, there is no textual evidence to suggest that Austin might have thought that what is true or false is the illocutionary act of stating alone. In fact, there is a paragraph where Austin seems explicitly to reject Searle's reading. Here is what Austin writes in the last lecture of *HTDW*, on the same page where he says that stating is an illocutionary force:

'Stating, describing, &c., are just two names among a very great many others for illocutionary acts; they have no unique position... In particular, they have no unique position over the matter of being related to facts in a unique way called being true or false, because truth and falsity are (except by an artificial abstraction which is always possible and legitimate for certain purposes) not names for relations, qualities, or what not, but for a dimension of assessment-how the words stand in respect of satisfactoriness to the facts, events, situations, &c., to which they refer.' (Austin, 1975, pp. 148-149).

Here, then, Austin re-states the position that we examined earlier: except in extreme cases or artificial circumstances of abstraction, truth and falsity represent a family or dimension of terms the use of which depends upon the circumstances (facts, situations etc), and illocutionary acts of any type, whether or not they consist in stating or describing, are insufficient on their own to determine truth or falsity. Instead, consideration of the speech act in the round is necessary for such an assessment.

It therefore doesn't seem that Austin was misled by the two meanings of 'statements', as Searle claims, since this assertion is not backed up by the text (he doesn't use 'statement' in his initial distinction to refer to what is true or false in *HTDW*), nor is it compatible with Austin's

explicit perspective on ‘truth’ as a dimension word, a factor which Searle ignores.

The next section draws to a conclusion the examination of ‘true’ and the importance for Austin of its being a dimension word by focusing on a recent debate between Alice Crary and Nat Hansen concerning Austin’s view of ‘literal meaning’. I will argue that whilst both parties represent some aspects of Austin’s position correctly, it is again the failure to ramify fully his view that ‘true’ is a dimension word that undermines their conclusions.

2.3.4. The Crary-Hansen debate: literal meaning and truth

Crary gives a reading of Austin which portrays him as someone who attacks the view of ‘literal meaning’. According to Crary, Austin tries to show that the ‘traditional statement’ is an illusion. ‘The picture of correspondence between language and the facts that Austin takes to be implicit in a traditional ideal of the ‘statement’ is one on which the business of corresponding to the facts is the prerogative of what might be called bi-polar ‘statements’ or propositions, i.e. ‘statements’ or propositions that always describe states of affairs either truly or falsely.’ (Crary, 2002, pp. 59-60). And this perspective on Austin’s work seems to be consistent with my analysis above: the collapse of the constative/performative distinction and the realisation of the importance of the recognition of ‘truth’ as a dimension word clearly militate against the ‘traditional statement’ which is either true or false.

However, Crary continues ‘[Austin] proceeds by arguing that this idea [the traditional statement] is nourished by a view of meaning on which sentences possess what are sometimes called literal meanings (i.e. meanings they carry with them into every context of use) and by arguing that this view fails to withstand critical scrutiny.’ (Crary, 2002, p. 60). According to Crary, Austin attacks the traditional

statement and its traditional ‘true’ or ‘false’ *by attacking* the view of ‘literal meaning’.

Hansen disagrees with Crary. He argues that Austin seems to endorse the literal meaning view, where literal meaning ‘is that grasp of the meanings of words and the rules by which they are combined into complex expressions (including sentences) [which] enables one to know what has to be the case in order for the sentence to be true.’ (Hansen, 2012, p. 3).

The question which Crary and Hansen debate is thus whether Austin thinks that there is a literal meaning of sentences which is what is true or false, and is invariant over different uses. Crary thinks that he doesn’t and Hansen thinks that he does. In what follows I will seek to show that the answer is somewhere between these two poles: I suggest that for Austin there is indeed a literal meaning which the sentence carries with it in all its uses, but this literal meaning is not to be identified with what is true or false.

Crary’s argument can be divided into two steps. In the first, Crary maintains that ‘Austin stresses that he thinks that whenever I say anything (except things like ‘ouch’ and ‘damn’) I perform both a locutionary act ... and an illocutionary act...He is drawn towards this view by the thought that there is no such thing as identifying the meaning of a combination of words (or: no such thing as identifying the ‘locutionary act’ performed when a combination of words is uttered) independently of an appreciation of how those words are being used to say something to someone on a particular occasion (or: independently of an appreciation of their ‘illocutionary force’)’ (Crary, 2002, p. 680).

In the second, Crary takes the interrelated connection between locutionary and illocutionary acts to show that there cannot be a literal meaning of sentences. ‘Austin’s account of locutionary and

illocutionary acts, taken as a whole, brings into question the idea that we might develop a theory that could be used to identify the locutionary acts performed whenever particular sentences are used... he criticizes it by rejecting as flawed an idea that it presupposes, viz., that it is possible to isolate the locutionary act that is performed when a particular sentence is employed in the absence of a grasp of the illocutionary force with which it is being used.' (Crary, 2002, pp. 69-70).

According to Crary, then, Austin thinks that the sentence cannot carry with it an invariant literal meaning in all its uses because in order to understand an utterance, the whole speech act has to be grasped. Because we can't separate the two acts, because we need to understand the speech act as a whole, it is not possible to understand the 'locutionary meaning' in isolation from the whole speech act, and there therefore cannot be an invariant literal meaning.

Hansen disagrees. Firstly, he maintains that Austin thought that locutionary acts could be separated from illocutionary acts. 'Austin nowhere explicitly commits himself to the idea that identifying the locutionary act performed by an utterance requires an appreciation of the illocutionary act performed by that utterance as well.' (Hansen, 2012, p. 6). He quotes Austin saying that 'it might be perfectly possible, with regard to an utterance, say 'It is going to charge', to make entirely plain 'what we were saying' in issuing the utterance... and yet not at all to have cleared up whether or not in issuing the utterance I was performing the [illocutionary] act of warning or not. It may be perfectly clear what I mean by 'It is going to charge' or 'Shut the door', but not clear whether it is meant as a statement or warning, &c.' (Austin, 1975, p. 98). If Hansen is correct, and we can understand the locutionary meaning in isolation from the illocutionary force, it might

be possible to read Austin as allowing that a literal meaning might be assigned to the locutionary part.⁹¹

But Hansen, secondly, goes further. According to him, even if you have to understand the whole speech act in order to understand the locutionary meaning, this does not entail that there is no ‘literal meaning’. As long as there is a distinction between ‘meaning’ and ‘force’, and as long as we think that there is a way to make this distinction clear, it is possible that different speech acts might have different ‘forces’ and still share the same ‘meaning’. He maintains that there is nothing in Crary’s argument which blocks this approach⁹² and that, as a result, it is plausible that this shared ‘meaning’ is indeed invariant across different uses, and is what is true or false.

However, both Crary’s and Hansen’s accounts of what is ‘true’ or ‘false’ and the locutionary/illocutionary distinction is problematic. Crary, on the one hand, argues that for Austin there is no literal meaning, whereas Hansen, on the other, argues that probably for Austin there is such a literal meaning. I argue that the answer is in the middle: for Austin, there is indeed a literal meaning which the sentence carries with it in all its uses, but this literal meaning is not what is true or false.

The pertinent issue, it seems to me, is the one discussed earlier in relation to Searle and Strawson’s propositional interpretation: it is the whole speech act which needs to be taken into account in order to assess the ‘truth’ or ‘falsity’ of an utterance.

Thus, based on the textual analysis and the earlier interpretations, it seems that Austin’s position may run something like this. On the one

⁹¹ See Hansen, 2012, pp. 6-7. He is aware that the text is not conclusive, which is why he only thinks we might attribute to Austin the literal meaning view.

⁹² See Hansen, 2012, p. 6.

hand, Austin stresses that the illocutionary and locutionary are inseparable *as acts*. Austin writes about the relation between locutionary meaning and illocutionary force: ‘in general the locutionary act as much as the illocutionary is an abstraction only: every genuine speech act is both...’⁹³ (Austin, 1975, p. 147). Again, he says that ‘[T]o perform a locutionary act is in general, we may say, also and *eo ipso* to perform an *illocutionary* act.’ (Austin, 1975, p. 98). It seems that this is what impresses Crary and gives strength to her reading. However, on the other hand, it seems clear that Austin doesn’t preclude (and may even support) the idea that the same locutionary meaning may persist across different forces. I agree with Hansen that it doesn’t seem that there is textual evidence for taking Austin to reject such an idea. The key point, though, is that this apparently stable and independent meaning is not truth evaluable: this is the province of the whole speech act.

I therefore agree with Hansen that for Austin it is possible to abstract from the whole speech act ‘meaning’ and ‘force’, and that it *is possible* to abstract the ‘literal meaning’ of sentences, the ‘locutionary meaning’ from different speech acts. For example, by uttering ‘Shoot her!’, we might have different forces, such as urging, or advising, or ordering me to shoot her, but we have one locutionary meaning ‘Shoot her’. (Austin, 1975, pp. 101-102). In that sense, there might be literal meaning which is invariant in different uses. However, Hansen conflates meaning and truth evaluability in making his claim that the literal meaning, once abstracted, is what is true or false. On this point, Austin is better interpreted as I explained above: for him what is true or false is the whole speech act.

Some indirect support for this position can be found in Charles Travis’s work. Whilst Travis does not give an explicit interpretation

⁹³ He adds, ‘But, of course, typically we distinguish different abstracted ‘acts’...’

of Austin's text nor does he cash out his 'pragmatic view', as he calls it, in terms of locutionary meaning and illocutionary force, he nevertheless acknowledges Austin as an inspiration. He (Travis) mainly focuses on the interrelation between being true and false and being uttered under specific circumstances. In particular, there is common ground in the idea that there is a level of meaning which the words (sentences) have, which is constant in different uses, but which is separate from the issue of being true or false.

Travis distinguishes between two kinds of what he calls semantic properties for sentences. 'The first sort of property is one of relating in a given way to truth (or falsity). Properties of being true (false) if, given, of, or only if, thus and so, or thus, or the way things are, are all within this class... The second sort are properties identified without mention of truth, and on which truth-involving properties depend'. (Travis, 2008, p. 110). According to Travis, there are some properties, what we can describe as a level of meaning the words (sentences) would have independent of being true or false. However, there is another level of meaning, other properties which relate to judgements of true or false. There is here a distinction between what the words mean on the one hand, and what is to be true or false on the other, the latter is to be identified according to a specific speaking of the words, in specific conditions.

This distinction between two levels of meaning is very close to the interpretation I give to Austin's text. I argued that for Austin, there is a level of meaning the words have (the locutionary part of the speech act), independent of being true or false. This seems to be invariant in different uses. Travis's view is that this level of '[M]eaning fixes something words would do (and say) wherever spoken meaning what they do; something they are for, so also something about what they ought to do.' (Travis, 2008, p. 96). This level fixes meaning in a way which is not related to any specific speaking of the words, and is not related to being true or false.

I also argued that being true or false is related to issuing a whole speech act in a specific situation. Travis's view is that what words (a sentence) 'mean leaves it open for them to be used (in suitable circumstances) to say any of various things, each true under, and on, different conditions.' (Travis, 2008, p. 97). For Travis then, being true or false is a matter of uttering the words, the speech act, under specific circumstances, in specific conditions. Different speakings of the words share the same first level of meaning, which is constant and invariant, but being true or false is a matter for a specific speaking of the words under specific circumstances.

3. Conclusions

3.1. 'True' as a dimension word

We saw that one of the central examples in Austin's work, 'truth', is directly related to the unity problem. Austin protests against the assumption that 'truth' stands for something simple, that it has one meaning: 'it is essential to realize that 'true' and 'false' ... do not stand for anything simple at all; but only for a general dimension of being a right or proper thing to say as opposed to a wrong thing, in these circumstances, to this audience, for these purposes and with these intentions.' (Austin, 1975, p. 145). 'True', according to Austin, is a dimension word, it has one and the same semantic function in all its uses, but different specific meanings according to the context. It is the most abstract word in a family of words that are used to assess the relation between words and the world, 'truth and falsity are (except by an artificial abstraction which is always possible and legitimate for certain purposes) not names for relations, qualities, or what not, but for a dimension of assessment- how the words stand in respect of satisfactoriness to the facts, event, situations &c., to which they refer.' (Austin, 1975, p. 149).

This notion of 'true' as a dimension word is of vital importance to Austin's work. As we have seen, it is foundational to his criticism of a number of different proposals concerning the nature of 'truth', and, at the same time, a substantial driver of his theory of speech acts. In section 2.1 we saw that the redundancy theory, and the first claim of Strawson's performative theory, which states that 'true' is not used to make an assertion, are criticised by Austin. Austin complains that the claim that 'is true' is not used to make any assertion about P overlooks that fact that the expression is part of a family of words, that 'true' is a dimension word, and that all these expressions are used to assess the relation between the words and the world.

In 2.2, we saw that the distinction between constatives and performatives, which was suggested as a solution to the descriptive fallacy, fails because 'truth' is a dimension word, and the terms we use to assess both kinds of utterances overlap. These terms belong to the family of 'true' where all terms are used to assess the relation between utterances and the world in different dimensions and degrees. In 2.3, we saw that the 'propositional interpretation' fails to give an accurate reading of Austin's distinction between locutionary and illocutionary acts because it, too, misunderstands Austin's views on 'truth' as a dimension word. In particular, it fails to appreciate the importance of, and the reasons for, the collapse of the constative/performative distinction, which provides Austin with the framework for introducing the new theory of speech acts.

In addition, I argued that a proper understanding of Austin's views on 'truth' would clarify his views on the locutionary/illocutionary distinction and make it clear that 'truth' is to be applied only to the whole speech act, and not to the locutionary part or the illocutionary force of stating. This finding was also central to the adjudication on Crary's and Hansen's views concerning 'literal meaning', and demonstrated that, for Austin, there is a level of 'literal meaning' which is invariant in different uses but is not to be identified with what

is true or false, the latter being determined by the speech act as a whole.

Finally, we can say that the ‘correspondence theory of truth’, which Austin adopts in ‘Truth’, is developed and broadened, not rejected. Austin still holds that the terms of the family of ‘truth’ are used to assess the relation between utterances and the world. However, it now includes different kinds of utterances which all ‘correspond to facts’ in different ways. Rather than restricting truth and falsity to statements alone, Austin proposes, with his new theory of speech acts, that any speech act as a whole may be judged in this way, in different degrees and dimensions depending on circumstances and context.

Whilst Austin may not be completely systematic or comprehensive in his theories, the ‘pattern’ and influence of the dimension word (and its application to ‘true’ in particular) can be discerned throughout the elements examined in these two chapters. In particular, the idea of a thin, abstract semantic element which is shared by all members of the family, but which generally proves to be inadequate for the determination of truth in the varied range of contexts and circumstances of usage, serves to emphasise the importance of context in determining truth or falsity of an utterance, and the potential separation of judgements of sentence-meaning and truth.

3.2. The unity problem and the compatibility problem

The unity problem is the central theme of this thesis. In the previous chapter I addressed Austin’s ‘theoretical’ work on this issue and we saw that Austin suggests that some words in OL have more than one meaning, possessing instead a range of different but related meanings. He thinks that in these cases the mistake which philosophers make consist in their tendency to look, nevertheless, for the one common meaning of the word, and to base their philosophical analysis on this feature. Austin thinks that this approach is unjustified when we look

at how words work in OL. In this chapter, I examined cases where Austin addresses some philosophical problems, and sought to show how philosophers are led into problems because they look for this one meaning. However, there are differences between the two examples discussed here.

In the first, 'real', the unity problem takes the following form: the problem is that philosophers focus on some cases, and generalize the account from these cases to all other instances. Thus, Austin's objection to Ayer is that he focuses on just a few cases, and generalises from that small sample: 'I should like to emphasize, however, how fatal it always is to embark on explaining the use of a word without seriously considering more than a tiny fraction of the contexts in which it is actually used...' (Austin, 1962, p. 83). It is important to point out that in such examples Austin does not think that what the philosopher takes as the meaning is *wrong*, rather, that it is too narrow.

In the second, 'true', Austin's concern is different. His worry is that philosophers are fixated on uncovering the common feature of a word that all uses share, and that this causes them to focus, in the case of dimension words, on the abstract semantic function present in all such words. Whilst he is perfectly clear that this is legitimate in the sense that this abstract element is indeed common to all uses, he thinks that philosophers who do so radically misunderstand the nature of such words, missing the fundamental point that, in all but extreme cases, it is the concrete meaning, the meaning that will be different from context to context, rather than the common abstract element, which is relevant. Indeed, one of his clear findings is that the abstract or semantic layer is far too thin generally to bear the weight placed on it in philosophical enquiry by those who use it as a common feature.

One qualification is in order, however. In claiming that examining Austin's thought in these particular areas should be through the lens of the unity problem, I do not deny that it is often possible to read

Austin as, at the same time, reminding philosophers how ordinary language works and showing that their approach is inconsistent with this usage. My point is rather that attention to the unity problem alongside Austin's analysis of the particular types of words that we have examined both better represents Austin's approach and better explains how the offending philosophers come to make the mistakes that they do, including the error of using language in a way that runs counter to ordinary language usage. Thus, there will, on occasion, be lessons for philosophers concerning the use of ordinary language, but my contention is that focusing on these findings, as those who view his work through the compatibility problem lens do, is a far less profitable route from the perspective of explaining Austin's thought, as well as being a less legitimate strategy so far as interpretation of his work is concerned.

Conclusions

In this thesis I have argued that, in a number of prominent cases, Wittgenstein and Austin are more productively viewed as tackling a problem which I badged the ‘unity problem’. The unity problem, which receives little treatment in the literature, diagnoses the underlying issue in certain cases of philosophical difficulty not as a lack of compatibility with ordinary language but, instead, an implicit or explicit commitment to a search for a single common element that, it is presumed, is present in all cases where the same word is used.

I have sought to show that one of the principal reasons why commentators largely ignore this approach is because they adopt an almost exclusive focus on what I call the ‘compatibility problem’. The compatibility problem presumes that the underlying cause of philosophical difficulties relates to philosophers saying something which we would not say in OL, or violating its rules. OLP is then supposed to show philosophers that this transgression is a key source of traditional philosophical troubles in the context of specific issues such as the mind-body problem, the nature of truth... etc... By contrast, I claim that the purpose of the appeal to OL in these cases is not necessarily to identify specific sentences or strings of words that we would not ordinarily say, but rather to demonstrate that looking for something common to all cases in which we use the same word is misguided.

Whilst I have claimed that viewing the writings of Austin and Wittgenstein on particular philosophical problems through the lens of the unity problem is both more productive in elucidating their positions and more faithful to the particular texts, I have also been

clear that there are, nevertheless, differences in their approaches. Thus, Wittgenstein often merely seeks to demonstrate that there need not be something in common between all the cases in which we use the same word, whereas Austin, for instance in the case of dimension words, recognises that there might indeed be something in common between the examples, but that it is too abstract and too weak to bear the weight expected of it by philosophers who search for a common feature that will resolve intractable philosophical problems.

In analysing both Wittgenstein's and Austin's treatment of the unity problem, I distinguished between their underlying 'theory', on the one hand, and their practice when dealing with particular examples, on the other.

In chapter 2, therefore, I firstly examined Wittgenstein's general approach to the unity question, i.e., do we use the same word in different cases because the cases have something in common. I evaluated three possible interpretations of Wittgenstein's position and concluded that what I labelled interpretation C was closest to his text and dealt with potential objections most effectively. This interpretation answers the unity question in the negative. However, I made it clear that Wittgenstein does not deny the existence of common feature concepts, but rather, according to this interpretation, he shows that certain concepts do not conform to that model. He suggests that phenomena are grouped under the same concept because of different kinds of relations and affinities between members of the concept's family. Importantly, however, this interpretation also denies the exclusive role of similarities in determining qualifying members, and argues that such a narrow reading is likely to distort the interpretation of Wittgenstein's overall perspective on concept attribution. Similarities, it proposes, should be regarded as only one of a number of potential relations, the others including mathematical, historical, and so on.

Interpretation C also clarified the potential confusion caused by Wittgenstein's own term 'family resemblance', identifying the focus on the genetic or causal implications of the term 'family' as potentially misleading, and preferring instead the view that 'family resemblance' simply indicates a grouping formed in virtue of overlapping resemblance or similarity between members. 'Family resemblance' concepts, therefore, are a subset of the wider grouping 'family concepts'.

Finally, in that chapter, I clarified the relationship between open concepts and family resemblance concepts, showing that they were certainly not synonymous, and that even claims of a weaker association between the two could be misleading, particularly in the context of the unity problem where the distinction between 'common feature concepts' and 'family concepts' was critical.

In chapter 3, I turned to the analysis of prominent practical examples from Wittgenstein's work in order both to show the importance of the unity problem in his work, and to substantiate my earlier claim that the model presumed by the compatibility problem interpretation does not fit well with Wittgenstein's treatment of particular concepts. My findings demonstrated that the unity problem is central to his discussion of 'reading' and 'understanding', and that his main purpose there is to show that the assumption that there must be a common feature for these concepts is not justified, and that they are instead better regarded as 'family concepts'.

I also highlighted the influence that the presumption of the compatibility problem, in which it is assumed that the focus should be on philosophers saying something which we would not say in OL, has on the way in which Wittgenstein is read in the passages analysed. I argued against Hacker's strong conclusion that the purpose of the passages discussed is to show that the mental processes or feelings that on occasion accompany 'reading' or 'understanding' can *never* be

qualifying features of ‘reading’ or ‘understanding’, and diagnosed the problem with his approach as stemming from his (compatibility problem) preoccupation with finding inconsistencies or incompatibilities between the philosopher’s use of language and the way in which ordinary language actually works. This, I claimed, generally predisposed him to take a somewhat black-and-white approach, ruling in or out absolutely. I argued that this strong interpretation is not supported by the text and, instead, that one should view Wittgenstein as simply seeking to show how to falsify common feature claims concerning mental processes, whilst allowing that they (mental processes) may, under specific circumstances, qualify as members of the family of features that make up ‘reading’ and ‘understanding’.

I observed that Wittgenstein’s method in these cases consists of two sides: one negative and the other positive. The negative approach aims to show that the proposed definition does not work for all cases, although it may for some. In both ‘reading’ and ‘understanding’, this takes the form of Wittgenstein’s offering a counterexample to the proposed common feature alongside an instance that supports it. The purpose of this is twofold: whilst the counterexample shows that the presence of the feature under examination is not a necessary condition for the phenomenon to be subsumed under the concept, the supporting example, on the other hand, allows that such a feature might, nevertheless, be the qualifying feature under specific circumstances. This lays the groundwork for the second stage, the positive approach, in which Wittgenstein suggests that the concept in question is better conceived of as a ‘family concept’.

My overall conclusion, in light of the above investigations into Wittgenstein’s ‘theory’ and practice in these particular areas, was that the framework of the unity problem had been shown to represent an important and somewhat neglected aspect of his philosophy, and that too strong an allegiance to viewing his work through the lens of the

compatibility problem has, in the case of certain interpreters, obscured this key facet of his philosophy, and led to a misunderstanding of his position.

In chapters 4 and 5, I turned to the examination of Austin's answer to the unity question. I adopted a similar approach to that taken above with Wittgenstein in which the wider 'theory' was analysed in the first chapter, with specific examples being examined in the second chapter.

In answering the unity question, Austin attacks what he considers a false dichotomy, in which words must either have one unequivocal meaning or a number of different meanings. Instead, Austin wants to show that there are some words which have a range of different-but-related meanings. His concern is that philosophers seem to ignore these kinds of words. In my analysis of his writing, I distinguished between two distinct phases, early Austin and later Austin, each of which provides a different sense of how Austin understands the notion of there being something 'in common' between all uses of the word. The early Austin accepts the general denotational framework, but rejects the specific doctrine of naming which construes 'one meaning'/'what is in common' as referring to a single entity that the words denotes. Austin instead suggests that a word might stand for various different kinds of things.

Later Austin, on the other hand, targets the doctrine of naming in a more radical way and attacks the basic denotational assumption that all words must name things. He suggests that naming is just one function that words fulfil, and gives examples of words discharging different functions: 'adjuster words', which function to adjust other words in extraordinary cases, and 'trouser words', which work so as to exclude its opposite. He also suggests that, so far as determining meaning is concerned, looking for the entity, or even entities, that the word names is not necessarily the route to be followed. As a result, he claims that meaning will often depend on the different features,

characteristics and criteria that a word might have in the various different circumstances in which it is used.

However, in discussing a further word type, 'dimension words', he distinguishes between two levels of meaning. Whilst it is clear that at the lower level of concrete or 'specific' meaning the contextual influence described above is often dominant, he acknowledges that at the abstract, or semantic function, level there *is* something that is held in common by the word in all its uses. However, this is minimal in the case of trouser words and adjuster words, and even in the case of dimension words is insubstantial and insufficient, except in extreme abstract circumstances, to serve successfully as the predominant focus of enquiry if the objective is to determine the meaning of a word. Thus, Austin's position on the unity question is different to that of Wittgenstein, but it is clearly a major focus of his, and his concession to the common feature theorist is minimal.

The detailed discussion of two specific examples from Austin's work in chapter 5 reinforced this position. In the first, 'real', the unity problem takes the following form: the problem is that philosophers focus on some cases, and generalize the account from these cases to all other instances. It is important to point out that in such examples Austin does not think that what the philosopher takes as the meaning is necessarily *wrong*, rather, that it is too narrow to be generalised. Austin here can be seen to be taking a similar, or at least related, position to that of Wittgenstein in questioning whether it is safe to draw classification rules from individual examples.

In the second example, 'true', Austin's focus is slightly different. His worry again concerns the idea that philosophers are fixated on uncovering the common feature of a word that all uses share, but in the case of 'true', a dimension word, Austin thinks that this causes them to focus on the abstract semantic function present in all such words ('true' is Austin's parade case of a dimension word). Whilst he

is perfectly clear that this is legitimate in one sense, because this abstract element is indeed common to all uses, he thinks that philosophers who do so nevertheless radically misunderstand the nature of such words, missing the fundamental point that, in all but extreme cases, it is the specific or *concrete* meaning, i.e., the meaning that will be different from context to context, rather than the common abstract element, which is relevant. Indeed, one of his most important contributions is to demonstrate that the abstract or semantic layer is not what counts in the determination of meaning, and thus that reliance on it in the context of seeking to solve philosophical problems is likely to be fraught with difficulties.

I claim that examining Austin's thought in these particular areas is better undertaken through the lens of the unity problem, but I do not deny that it is often possible to read Austin as, at the same time, reminding philosophers how ordinary language works and showing that their approach is inconsistent with this usage. My point is that attention to the unity problem in interpreting Austin's analysis of the particular types of words that I have examined both better represents Austin's approach and better explains how philosophers come to make the mistakes that they do, including the error of using language in a way that runs counter to ordinary language usage. Thus there will, on occasion, be lessons for philosophers concerning the use of ordinary language, but focusing on these findings, as those who view his work through the compatibility problem lens do, is a far less profitable route from the perspective of explaining Austin's thought on these matters, as well as being a less legitimate strategy for the interpretation of his work in these areas.

Of the three types of word examined, the dimension word is by far the most important in Austin's wider philosophy. The idea that 'truth' is a dimension word is foundational to his criticism of a number of different proposals concerning the nature of 'truth', and, at the same time, a substantial driver of his theory of speech acts. Austin criticises

both the redundancy theory and the first claim of Strawson's performative theory from that standpoint, arguing that it is only in cases of artificial abstraction that truth and falsity are 'names for relation, quantities, or what not', and that it should rather be considered a dimension of assessment. The expression 'is true' is thus better viewed as part of a family of words, and all the expressions within the dimension are used to assess the relation between the words and the world.

The implications of the realisation that 'truth' is a dimension word are also behind the collapse of the distinction between constatives and performatives which was initially suggested as a solution to the descriptive fallacy. Austin observes that the terms we use to assess both kinds of utterances overlap, and that these terms belong to the family of 'true' where all terms are used to assess the relation between utterances and the world in different dimensions and degrees. I diagnosed 'the propositional interpretation's failure accurately to represent Austin's distinction between locutionary and illocutionary acts as resting on its failure to appreciate both the importance of, and the reasons for, this collapse.

And it is this collapse, and, again, the notion that 'truth' is a dimension word, which provide Austin with the framework for introducing a new theory of speech acts in which it is clear that 'truth' is only to be applied to the whole speech act. These factors were also seen to be central to the adjudication on Crary's and Hansen's views concerning literal meaning, and demonstrated that, for Austin, whilst there is a level of 'literal meaning' which is invariant in different uses, it is not to be identified with what is true or false, this being determined by the speech act as a whole.

The form of Austin's views on sentence-meaning mirrors to a large degree his position in relation to the unity problem discussed above. Whilst the two accounts are distinct, what they share is a caution

concerning the attempt to isolate a common feature, either representing the essential factor in the specification of a concept or the essential component of sentence-meaning, *independent of the influence of context*. In both cases Austin recognises the initial attraction of such an approach, and is happy to concede that there may be a common feature shared by the discussed concepts on occasion, and an invariant literal meaning for sentences. However, his key point is that such an ‘essential’ component is generally far too weak to support the purposes for which it is employed philosophically, and, instead, it is the different contexts and circumstances in which the word is used, or the sentence uttered, which play the dominant role.

Throughout the thesis, in both the particular discussions of Austin’s and Wittgenstein’s ‘theory’ and practice, and in the wider analysis of their similarities and differences, it is apparent that attention to the unity problem in their work is justified and represents an important way of understanding their thought and writing. Key passages in their work demonstrate that the tendency of philosophers to look for a feature that is common to all cases is unreliable in key cases. In addition, the analysis of prominent commentators undertaken in the thesis demonstrates, particularly in the case of Wittgenstein, that an overreliance on the compatibility problem framework for interpretation runs the risk of distorting the reading of the text and missing key insights that recourse to the unity problem lens reveals.

This approach also demonstrates how subtle and carefully considered Austin’s and Wittgenstein’s positions in fact are. Whilst the lens of the compatibility problem tends to incline philosophers and commentators to black-and-white judgements, and to colour interpretation of Wittgenstein, in particular, accordingly, it is evident that both philosophers are themselves remarkable in their lack of dogmatism. Thus, Wittgenstein merely suggests through counterexamples and attention to the way in which examples are grouped under concepts, and Austin, although he recognises the presence of an essential

component in the discussed concepts, and the literal meaning for sentences, works carefully to show how misleading it would be to ignore the contextual differences which are crucial to understanding the work of words and sentences.

Finally, I should make it clear that there is no suggestion that the lens of the unity problem is the only way in which to view Austin's and Wittgenstein's work. Rather, what I have sought to establish in this thesis is that such an approach is more legitimate in the particular examples analysed, and reveals aspects of both philosophers' thought that might otherwise be neglected. Of course, that is not to say that the examples chosen, whilst prominent in each philosopher's work, exhaust the potential fruitful application of this framework.

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