Use and Meaning

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1 Opening

Many philosophers have found themselves tempted by the view that meaning is, in some way or other, determined by use—which claim I shall call the Use-Meaning Thesis. Stated in such general terms, of course, the Thesis is merely programmatic. Until it is said what use is supposed to be—that is, in what terms use is to be characterized—and how use is supposed to determine meaning, it can function at most as a framework principle. The Thesis will thus admit of a wide range of specifications, depending upon how the notion of meaning is explained and how use is thought to determine meaning, as well as upon how the notion of use itself is understood. My purpose in the present paper is to begin to clarify the Thesis by focusing on this last issue and, more specifically, upon the questions what different characterizations of use might be available and how a choice among them might be made.

I intend to approach these questions by considering John McDowell's claim[1] that anyone who would attempt to develop the Use-Meaning Thesis will face a dilemma when forced to answer the question whether use encompasses the *contents* expressed by utterances. If it does, then the right way to describe the use of a sentence will be in terms of what it can be used to *say*: the sentence 'Snow is white', for example, is used to express the thought that snow is white. But then, although the Thesis will surely be true—the meaning of a sentence can be taken to be the thought it is used to express—it will not be particularly likely to have far-reaching philosophical consequences. On the other hand, if the notion of use is not, in this sense, 'meaning-laden', it is hard to see how use should be explained, if the use | of a sentence is not to be characterized in broadly Quinean terms, that is, in terms of the noises people make and the circumstances under which they make them. But then, the Use-Meaning Thesis will commit us to a behavioristic reduction of meaning, which few nowadays would find appealing. The challenge McDowell poses, and which I want here to take up, is thus to explain how the

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[1] I shall draw chiefly on McDowell (1998b). Similar views are expressed in a number of McDowell's writings, to some of which I shall refer below.

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Thesis can be both substantial and plausible, that is, to identify a notion of use that is non-behavioristic but not meaning-laden.

2   Use as Meaning: Metaphysical, Not Epistemological

No-one has done more to contribute to the development of the Use-Meaning Thesis than Michael Dummett, and it is with Dummett's conception of it, and its significance, that McDowell's reflections begin. According to McDowell (1998b, pp. 239ff), Dummett's refusal to countenance a meaning-laden notion of use is, at bottom, driven by a flawed epistemology of understanding. On this picture, when someone makes an utterance, what are immediately available to other speakers are simply facts about what sounds were produced under what circumstances: The epistemological problem facing speakers is to reconstruct from this meager data the meanings carried by the sounds. One might call this picture of understanding the 'sense-datum conception of understanding', for it is, as McDowell emphasizes, analogous to the picture of perception found in sense-datum epistemologies: In that case, what are immediately available to me are but facts about my own experiential states, and my problem is to determine what my having these states might tell me about the external world. It is the corresponding picture, in the case of understanding, that is supposed to motivate Dummett's own conception of use, which must now be the Quinean one mentioned above: The use someone makes of a sentence is to be characterized behavioristically, in terms of the sounds she produces and the conditions under which she does so—in terms that do not involve the notion of meaning, nor any psychological notions at all. For the problem is to show how one can get from the data immediately available in experience, itself conceived along broadly empiricist lines, to knowledge of what is said.[2]

It is worth emphasizing, before we move on, that the analogy between understanding and perception cuts both ways. McDowell wants to argue, in the perceptual case, that once we recognize that we literally *see*, say, that there is a lamp on the desk—that experience provides us with such conceptual contents—we should no longer concern ourselves with questions about what determines perceptual content.[3] McDowell seems to think that one can only take seriously the question what

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[2] That there is something wrong with McDowell's interpretation of Dummett is suggested by the fact that Dummett frequently expresses dissatisfaction with Quine's conception of use. See, for example, his (1993d, p. 105), where he writes that 'the notion of knowledge cannot...be extruded from the philosophy of language'. For references to others with similar interpretations of Dummett, and criticism of that reading, see Shieh (1998).

[3] At least this seems to be part of the force of the argument of McDowell (1996): see lecture 3 and the appendix to it. I have in mind McDowell's criticisms of Christopher Peacocke's use of the notion of non-conceptual content in Peacocke (1992). For a little more on this, see note 38.

it is for particular experiences to have the contents they do if one thinks that experience as such, as it is in | itself, is content-free: The problem then becomes to   533
explain how we, as perceivers, can assign content to experiences that, in and of
themselves, are without it, are mere subjective happenings. But the question what
determines perceptual content is independent of the question whether experience
has content, as it is in itself: We could, so far as I can see, even concede that an experience could not be the very experience it was without having the very content it
did, and yet raise the question what determined its content, or what determined that
someone had an experience with *that* content rather than some other. The present
discussion of the case of understanding may therefore teach us lessons that can also
be applied to the case of perception.[4]

McDowell argues in detail that the sense-datum conception of understanding
is untenable, and I have no wish to quarrel with him. It is obviously incorrect, phenomenologically speaking, that we simply hear other speakers as making noises:
We literally hear them as having *said* certain things, for example, that snow is
white.[5]   And if the only reason to insist upon a 'meaning-free' description of
use were epistemological prejudice, that conception of use would have to be rejected. But there is an answer to this argument of McDowell's: That a rejection of
meaning-laden notions of use need not need be founded upon any epistemological
doctrine, prejudicial or otherwise, but should rest upon a conception of the purpose
of the Use-Meaning Thesis. McDowell's discussion makes it seem as if the Thesis
is a doctrine about how we, as speakers, are able to determine what others mean.
But, properly understood, it proposes a framework for answering the question *what
it is* for expressions to mean what they do, what determines what they mean, in a
metaphysical sense. That is to say, the Use-Meaning Thesis is not an epistemological doctrine, but a metaphysical one.[6] So the appropriateness of a particular
conception of use for specifying the Thesis needs to be evaluated in terms of the
metaphysical purposes for which it is wanted. We are not free to select any conception we please, however phenomenologically or epistemologically appealing it
might be. To characterize use in terms that incorporate the notion of what a sentence means is to trivialize the metaphysical project to which the Thesis is intended
as a contribution: Obviously, if we use the sentence 'Snow is white' to express the
thought that snow is white, no theory that says it means something else can be correct; just as obviously, nothing of metaphysical interest follows. So a conception
of use fit to serve the purposes the Thesis is intended to serve can not help itself to

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[4] I have discussed some of McDowell's reflections on perception in Heck (2000).

[5] Dummett concedes this point in his reply to 'In Defense of Modesty' (Dummett, 1987, p. 257).

[6] I should also argue that some of McDowell's discussions of perception run epistemological
issues together with metaphysical ones (as do those of some of other recent defenders of direct
realist views about perception). On this point, see Peacocke (1992, p. 238, n. 22).

facts about the meanings of sentences or other expressions. (It is another question, of course, what an appropriate notion of use might look like—a question to which I shall turn in the next section.)

Now, McDowell could (and, I think, would) concede that the Use-Meaning Thesis is intended to be a metaphysical principle in this sense. His | view, as I understand it, is that the impression that there is a substantial question about what it is for words to mean what they do depends somehow upon the sense-datum conception of understanding. And so, he might say, I have done nothing to rebut his argument, since I have not provided any alternative way of motivating this problem, that is, of explaining why one ought to think there is a problem about what it is for words to mean what they do. But I find it difficult to understand how liberation from the sense-datum conception is supposed to dissolve this problem— and even harder to know how to evaluate a claim of this kind. And, although I believe there is more that could be said to motivate the metaphysical project, one part of me wants simply to say that it is *obvious* that there is a real problem about the nature of meaning and that, if one wants to insist upon assigning the burden of proof here, it is far from clear that it should not go to McDowell.

But this response would miss part of McDowell's point, for he does offer positive reasons to think that the question what it is for expressions to mean what they do need not be taken seriously. What I shall claim in response is that his arguments rest upon a confusion about the nature of 'homophonic' theories of truth—theories whose meta-languages include their object-languages—and upon a failure to appreciate the distinction between two different, but intimately related, sorts of questions: Semantic questions, such as what the reference of a particular expression is, or what logical form a particular sort of sentence should be taken to have; and meta-semantic questions, such as what it is for a particular expression to have the reference that it does.[7]

It would be wrong to say that McDowell does not recognize this distinction at all, or that he rejects meta-semantic questions as unintelligible (though he does sometimes give that impression). In fact, he does offer an answer to the question what it is for a sentence to mean what it does, namely: A sentence S means that *p* iff the assumption that S means that *p*

> should fit into a wider context, in which the speakers' behavior in general, including their linguistic behavior and their non-linguistic behavior, under suitable descriptions, can be made sufficiently intelligible in light of propositional attitudes... whose ascription to them is suf-

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[7] As I shall suggest below, part of the problem here is an ambiguity in the term 'theory of meaning'. I shall use the term 'theory of truth' to refer to *semantic* theories and the term 'theory of meaning' to refer to *meta-semantic* theories.

ficiently intelligible in light of their behavior, again, and of the facts
which impinge on them. (McDowell, 1998e, pp. 44–5)

McDowell's answer to the meta-semantic question is thus a thin one: To say | that   535
'snow is white' means that snow is white is just to say that taking it to mean that
makes speakers 'sufficiently intelligible'.

Once we recognize this point, though, it becomes somewhat hard to under-
stand how McDowell can make the sorts of epistemological objections he does to
Dummett's position. Some of McDowell's writings make it seem that he takes
Dummett's claim that facts about what speakers mean by a given sentence are con-
stituted by facts about how they use it to be undermined by the observation that
our *apprehension* of what speakers mean is in no way dependent upon our appre-
hension of how they use it. But if that were his objection, it would apply equally
to his own position: My knowing that some stranger means that snow is white
when he says "snow is white" does not seem to depend upon my knowing that he
would be made sufficiently intelligible by this hypothesis. The objection McDow-
ell means to raise therefore must be sought elsewhere. McDowell is impressed by
a certain feature of homophonic theories of truth, and he suggests that attention
to this feature of them, together with recognition that homophonic theories are as
good as any, will encourage the proper attitude towards the ambitions of the theory
of meaning.[8] The thought here is that a theory of truth that reports such facts as

    'Snow is white' is true if, and only if, snow is white

does not invite perplexity about what it might be for it to be correct: it wears
its correctness on its face, as it were (McDowell, 1998c, p. 69). For it is obviously
a necessary condition on the correctness of a homophonic theory that it prove ho-
mophonic T-sentences, that is, theorems like 2. And if, as one might well think,[9]
the theory's meeting this condition were not only necessary but also sufficient for
its correctness, there would be no deep meta-semantic question to be raised about
it: the theory will be correct if, and only if, it proves all homophonic T-sentences;
whether it does so is a *formal* matter, something that can be decided simply by
looking at its syntax.[10] But if the correctness of the theory is, in that sense, obvi-
ous, it is hard to see why the question *what it is* for the theory to assign the right

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[8] The appropriate attitude is what McDowell calls a 'modest' one, and what is at issue here is,
in a sense, whether a theory of truth need only be modest—that is, need only state *what* meanings
the speaker takes expressions of her language to have—or must be full-blooded—that is, must also
explain what it is for her words to mean what they do.

  The issue I am discussing here has been discussed by Dummett on a number of occasions: see
Dummett (1993e, 1987, 1991, ch. 5). While I do not really disagree with his diagnosis, I am not
sure it goes deep enough; it has the additional disadvantage that it is given from deep inside his own
position.

[9] There are complications here, but they do not affect the points being made. See note 15.

[10] This kind of point is familiar from discussions of Tarksi's theory of truth. See, for example,

references to expressions should be taken seriously: The sort of meta-semantic question McDowell finds intelligible therefore has a trivial answer.

I do not want to object to McDowell's claim that the correctness of a homophonic theory of truth can, in a certain sense, be determined by reflection. It is worth noting, however, that, in establishing the truth of 2 by such reflection, we draw upon information that is not contained in it. One must realize that the sentence named on the left−hand side is the same as the sentence used on the right— and not just that it is the same sentence, in a syntactic sense, but that it has the same meaning. Nothing *in* the T-sentence tells one that: One could have a perfectly good understanding | of the sentence itself, and yet not realize that the same sentence is   536 both used and mentioned. One can build this information into the T-sentence this way:

The sentence on the right-hand side of this very biconditional is true, in the very language I am now speaking, if, and only if, snow is white.

And it is at least arguable that the truth of (2) will be completely obvious to anyone who understands it, although it is in fact equivalent to the original T-sentence 2, as that sentence is intended to be understood.

Note, however, that the fact reported by 2, and so by 2, is *contingent*.[11] It is obviously a contingent fact about my idiolect that the sentence 'Snow is white' is true in it if, and only if, snow is white.[12] It is this sort of fact that a theory of truth will report and partially explain, by deriving it from others about the meanings of sub-sentential expressions and grammatical constructions; and it is this contingent fact that 2 and 2 report. This would once have been confusing: how can it be *both* that 2 is contingent *and* that its correctness can be determined simply by reflection? But, thanks to Kripke, this is now a familiar sort of puzzle. Consider the sentence 'I am here'. Just by reflecting upon it, one can easily convince oneself that any utterance of it must be true. And yet the fact such an utterance would report would (typically) be contingent. That is to say, any particular utterance of the sentence would provide one with an example of a contingent a priori truth. Whether one really wants to say that T-sentences like 2 and 2 are contingent *a priori* (perhaps they are not really *a priori* at all), they are cut from the same cloth: They are sentences whose truth can be determined purely by reflection, and yet the facts they report are contingent ones.

McDowell's view, as said above, is that, once we see that there is no reason not

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Etchemendy (1988) and Soames (1984).

[11] The point being made here has its origin in Tarski's distinction between formal and material adequacy and in his separation of the mathematical from the empirical aspects of semantics. For more on this, see Heck (1997). Compare Dummett (1991, pp. 69–71).

[12] I might have used the word 'white' to mean *black*, and then 'Snow is white' would have been true if, and only if, snow were black—a fact I could then have reported, of course, by uttering 2.

to state a theory of truth as a homophonic theory, and see also that the correctness of a homophonic theory is something that is obvious to anyone who understands it, we ought to realize that there can be no serious question about what it is for it to be correct. But this argument finishes with a non-sequitur. If someone asks 'Why am I here?' it is no answer to tell her that 'here' conventionally refers to the place of utterance.[13] She knew *that*: What she wanted to know why she was in the place she happened to be at that time, which she picked out via the word 'here'. And if someone asks 'Why is "Snow is white" true if and only if snow is white?' it is no answer to tell him that the word 'true' is conventionally used so as to sustain disquotation. He knew *that*: What he wanted to know was why the truth of the sentence 'Snow is white' stands or falls with the whiteness of snow—rather than, say, with the greenness of grass.

These questions should not be confused with the historical question | how the   537
sentence 'snow is white' came to mean what it does. That question might be an-swered etymologically, and, of course, the answer is not likely to be of great philo-sophical interest. Rather, the question being asked is what it is about an utterance of this sentence that makes it mean anything at all, and what it is that makes it mean the very thing it does. The question, that is to say, is what the relevant difference is between "snow is white" and "blurg is white"; and between "snow is white" and "grass is green".[14]

These questions are not themselves philosophical ones: They presumably have answers that will one day be provided by some (perhaps now non-existent) branch of empirical linguistics. But it's not just that we don't know the answers to these questions. The problem is much worse than that: It is that we do not even have any very good idea what the answers to them might look like (which is not to say that no one has any ideas about the matter). We do not really know what properties of the sentence 'snow is white' are semantically significant. And in so far as we do not know that, we do not know how its semantically significant properties, whatever they may be, conspire to fix its meaning. This general ignorance is the source of philosophical problems about the nature of linguistic meaning: To ask what properties of an expression contribute to determining its meaning, and how they determine it, is precisely to ask the meta-semantic—that is, the metaphysical—question *what it is* for an expression to mean what it does. The Use-Meaning Thesis, as I understand it, amounts to a rough outline of an answer.

When we raise semantic questions, such as what logical form the sentence

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[13] I owe this example to Vann McGee. It inspired a much cleaner treatment of this entire issue. Note that one *might* put this point by saying that all that has actually been explained is why an *utterance of the sentence* 'I am here' is true, not why I am here. In so far as that is right, this sort of point is close to those made by Dummett in his discussions of this issue (1993e, pp. 8–12).

[14] For some further discussion of these matters, see Heck (2004).

'Snow is white' should be taken to have, we need not simultaneously raise meta-semantic questions, such as what it is for the sentence to have the truth-condition it does. Even if we operate under the assumption that the meta-language extends the object−language, so that the T-sentences the theory proves can be seen to be correct merely by reflection, the problem of constructing a theory of truth (for a natural language) that actually *has* all homophonic T-sentences as theorems is non-trivial. And although no serious semantic theory will be close to homophonic (indexicality already makes this impossible),[15] whatever vocabulary is common to the object- and meta-languages is typically assumed to have the same meaning in each. (That will simplify the task of evaluating the theory's correctness, even if it does not reduce it, in all cases, to a problem in proof-theory.) But that does not imply that meta-semantic questions are not there to be raised: and it does not imply that it is legitimate to appeal to the assumption that the meta-language extends the object-language in the context of *meta*-semantic investigations. To appeal to that assumption, and so to answer the question | what it is for 'Snow is white' to be   538 true if and only if snow is white by alluding to disquotation, is to fail to answer the question being asked.

It is instructive here to consider Donald Davidson's early writings on the theory of meaning. Discussing homophonic theories of truth, Davidson writes in 'Truth and Meaning' that 'the trouble is to get a theory that comes close to working; anyone can tell whether it is right' (Davidson, 1984c, p. 25). And yet, he also insists that a theory of truth is supposed to be an empirical theory about the semantic properties of the expressions in a particular language (Davidson, 1984c, p. 24–5, 27).[16] My point is not that Davidson is contradicting himself: we have seen that these views are compatible—if, by an empirical theory, we mean one that states contingent facts about its subject matter. It is, rather, that Davidson's expressing both of these views is an indication that he is interested in two different projects. The first is the semantic project of actually developing a theory of truth for a natural language, that is, a theory sufficient to yield theorems stating the semantic

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[15] It is one of the ironies of the subject that there is no agreement at all on how mass terms should be treated, that is, how a T-sentence for 'Snow is white' and other sentences containing 'snow' might actually be derived. Actual semantic theories for such sentences tend to make heavy use of concepts from Boolean algebra, and the T-sentences they deliver are not even close to homophonic. One can, of course, add axioms to force the theories to be homophonic, but doing so does not increase the interest of the theories. Moreover, semantics is interested in saying what *different* readings might be available for a given sentence: It is important that the sentence 'I almost had my wallet stolen' admits of three different readings; to capture the difference, the theory will have to be non-homophonic. See Higginbotham (1995), from which I borrow the example just used, which originates with Chomsky.

[16] See also (Davidson, 1984b, pp. 134–5). Davidson might be taken to mean by 'empirical' *a posteriori*, in which case there really is a contradiction—unless the claims are taken to concern different projects, as below.

properties of all expressions of English (and to systematize that collection of facts by deriving those concerning complex expressions from those about their simpler parts). The second is the meta-semantic project of answering the question what it is for English expressions to mean what they do.

The two projects are not always clearly distinguished in Davidson's writings, since, for him, they are intimately related. 'Truth and Meaning' is, I think it fair to say, most famous for Davidson's having proposed there that a 'theory of meaning' may take the form of a Tarskian theory of truth. But something that is, for the most part, only implicit in the paper is more significant. In 1967, semantics was still in its infancy, and its influence on philosophy of language was limited: Quine's discussions of the nature of meaning, for example, are quite independent of anything we would recognize as semantics. And yet, Davidson's whole approach, made more explicit in later writings, rests upon the thought that questions about the nature of meaning should be approached by inquiring into the form that might be taken by a complete 'theory of meaning'—that is, a semantic theory—for a natural language.[17]

Since a theory of truth, as Davidson conceives it, is a theory that proves sentences giving the meanings of all significant expressions of a given language, the metaphysical question what it is for an expression to mean what it does may be re-cast as: What is it for a theory of truth to be correct? Asking the question in this way forces us to base our answers to meta-semantic questions upon a conception of what semantic facts *are* that is clear enough, at least, for the purpose of developing a compositional theory of meaning for a complete language;[18] and it enables us to answer the question what it is for 'Snow is white' to be true if and only if snow is white, by addressing the | more specific questions what it is for its semantically significant parts to mean what they do and for the modes of composition to have the significance they do. To put the point crisply: Davidson's proposal is that meta-semantics should be *meta* with respect to *semantics*.

And, in the context of the meta-semantic project—which, as argued above, is the only one within which the Use-Meaning Thesis has any place—Davidson commits himself to a version of it. His view is that the correctness of a theory of truth is determined by the 'data' available to a 'radical interpreter' prior to, and indepen-

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[17] The claim is implicit in Davidson's suggestion that the correctness of the theory can be tested using something like radical translation (Davidson, 1984c, p. 27). It is made somewhat more explicit in 'Radical Interpretation' (Davidson, 1984b), where Davidson argues that a theory of truth can serve as a theory of interpretation.—I owe my own appreciation of this point to Higginbotham (1988).

[18] It is this issue that Davidson's other proposal addresses, for it embodies the suggestion that semantic facts are facts about the references of expressions, in the broad sense in which Frege used that term. It also reflects a commitment to Frege's context principle, that is, to the priority of sentence-meaning over word-meaning.

dently of, any understanding she might have (or come to have) of the language the theory concerns—that is, that a theory of truth's correctness is determined by how the object-language is used, where the notion of use is explained in terms of the data available to a radical interpreter. Davidson explicitly denies that these data include facts about what particular expressions mean. The reason that he restricts his notion of use in this way, and thereby rejects meaning-laden notions of use, is just the one mentioned earlier: To characterize use—that is, the data—in terms of the meanings of sentences would be to trivialize the claim that the semantic properties of expressions are determined by how they are used and, with it, the meta-semantic project of 'Radical Interpretation' (Davidson, 1984b, pp. 134–5).

If one runs the semantic and meta-semantic projects together in one's mind, it will indeed seem perplexing how one could be interested in homophonic theories of truth, as Davidson is, and yet think, as he also does, that there is a real question about what it is for a theory of truth to be correct, that is, that there is any problem to which the Use-Meaning Thesis might be the solution. But once the distinction between semantics and meta-semantics has been drawn, McDowell's assumption that homophonic theories have any special relevance to meta-semantics can be seen to rest upon a failure to appreciate it. Only if we assume that the meta-language extends the object-language can we reflectively convince ourselves of the truth of homophonic T-sentences—only then will consideration of such theories seem to cast doubt upon the depth of meta-semantic questions. But one can not appeal to that assumption in answering the meta-semantic questions to which the Use-Meaning Thesis provides an outline of an answer. (That is just to say that the original, flat-footed response to McDowell, that the Use-Meaning Thesis is a metaphysical principle, and not an epistemological one, stands.)

We are now in a position to return to the question on what grounds Dummett rejects meaning-laden notions of use. Dummett is primarily interested in questions about understanding, that is, in questions about linguistic and, specifically, semantic competence. And his proposal is that a speaker's semantic competence should be explained in terms of her knowing a theory of truth for her language, that is, in terms of knowledge | she has about her language's semantic properties. Dummett   540 does not, however, mean to be ignoring questions about the nature of meaning: his view, rather, is that '...the key to an account of language...is the explanation of an individual speaker's mastery of his language' (Dummett, 1993d, p. 99). That is to say, he construes the question whether a theory of truth for a given speaker's language is correct as the question whether she knows it—whether it states what she knows about the semantic properties of expressions of her language, in virtue of her knowing which she *is* a competent speaker.[19]

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[19] It is, as he puts it, 'not a description from the outside of the practice of using the language,

The suggestion that speakers know theories of truth for their languages raises some very hard problems.[20] It is far from clear what it might mean to ascribe knowledge of such a theory to a speaker, since ordinary speakers obviously do not consciously know theories of truth for their languages.[21] Now, the usual alternative is to suppose that such knowledge is *tacit* or *implicit*. But, even if we assume objections to the very intelligibility of the notion of tacit knowledge to have been answered, and even if we assume that we understand in what it might consist that a speaker has tacit knowledge of the semantic structure, or logical form, of sentences,[22] the question remains what it is for a speaker tacitly to know a particular theory of truth. For theories of truth may differ, even if they agree about logical form: They may have different axioms, leading the theories to output different T-sentences as theorems. The theories might output T-sentences that differ in truth-value, and it has not *even* been said, at this point, what it might be for one, rather than another, of these theories to be that tacitly known by a speaker.[23] Thus, the meta-semantic problems do not vanish once we assume that speakers know theories of truth for their languages; rather, they are transformed into questions about what it is for a speaker to know a particular such theory.

Dummett's answer to such questions is offered in passages like the following:

> [T]he philosophical task of explaining in what a mastery of a language consists is not completed when we have set out the theory of meaning for the language. ... [W]e have to go on to give an account of what it is to have such knowledge. This account can only be given in terms of the practical ability which the speaker displays in using sentences of the language.... (Dummett, 1993d, p. 101)

Now, it is tempting to interpret Dummett as claiming that a speaker's knowing a particular theory of truth consists in her having certain linguistic capacities. And,

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but... an object of *knowledge*' on the part of speakers (Dummett, 1993d, p. 100).

[20] These problems do not arise for Davidson. The problem facing the radical interpreter is to discover a theory her knowing which will *make* her a competent speaker. Davidson is free to suppose that the interpreter already understands a language in which the theory of meaning can be formulated. But for that very reason, the project of radical interpretation does not address questions of competence. This, indeed, is Dummett's most fundamental criticism of Davidson's program (Dummett, 1993e, p. 6).

[21] In a certain sense, it would not matter if they did. The knowledge that underlies competence *can not* be conscious, explicit knowledge: Even if Anglophone semanticists should one day give a complete theory of truth for English, it would not be their explicit knowledge of that theory that explained their competence (see Dummett, 1993e, pp. 21ff).

[22] For discussion of this, see Evans (1985); Davies (1987); and Wright (1993).

[23] Of course, it is also possible for the theories to have different axioms, but for the T-sentences output to agree in truth-value, even necessarily. This problem, the Foster problem, is part and parcel of the problem I am discussing. For my own preferred resolution of it, see Heck (2005).

in 'What is a Theory of Meaning?', he writes that a theory of truth is a 'theoretical representation of a practical ability', the implication being that a speaker's knowing the theory—that is, her understanding her language—simply consists in her being able to speak it (Dummett, 1993e, p. 21). On this view, | the structure the theory assigns to sentences has little purpose other than to articulate this complex ability into component sub-abilities, possession of which constitutes the speaker's understanding of the primitive expressions; these abilities then interact, in a way captured by the deductive structure of the theory, to produce other abilities, constituting the speaker's understanding of sentences (and other complex expressions). Talk of a speaker's 'knowing' the theory then becomes idiomatic: Speakers know the theory simply in the sense that it articulates an ability they possess; someone who did in fact know it would be able to speak the language. 541

If a theory of truth amounts to an articulation of a speaker's complex ability to speak her language into simpler abilities that jointly constitute it, it must surely follow that the correctness of the theory lies in its correctly characterizing this ability, in a correspondence between the references the theory assigns to the primitive expressions and aspects of the practice itself. That is to say, for Dummett, a description of the use of an expression will be an account of the ability a speaker must possess to understand it. How exactly these abilities are to be characterized remains open, but, as with Davidson, what is motivating Dummett's selection of a notion of use are meta-semantic concerns. This may be obscured by the fact that he argues for the Thesis by arguing that we have an obligation to say what it is for a speaker to know such a theory. But, as said above, on Dummett's view, to state the theory known by competent speakers *is* to say what those expressions mean; to say in what it consists that a particular such theory is that known by competent speakers is to say in what it consists that they mean what they do. Since, on Dummett's view, to know such a theory is be able to engage in the practice of speaking the language, the description of the practice—that is, speakers' use of the language—serves to ground an answer to the question what it is for expressions to mean what they do. To describe use in terms of the meanings of expressions would therefore be to render the Use-Meaning Thesis trivial, and that is why Dummett rejects meaning-laden notions of use.

3   Language, Thought, and Use

McDowell's challenge was to explain how the Use-Meaning Thesis can be both substantial and plausible. To this point, my task has been primarily defensive: I have argued only that a rejection of meaning-laden notions of use flows from an interest in meta-semantic questions and need not be grounded upon any particu-

lar view about the epistemology of understanding. But that will not much matter unless there are other notions | of use available, besides the Quinean one and the   542 meaning-laden one McDowell offers us, and I have yet to argue that there are any other alternatives. It is to that task that I now turn.

One might have hoped that an alternative notion of use could be extracted from the position with which we left Dummett at the end of the last section, from the idea that to understand a language is to possess a practical capacity to speak it. But McDowell's most important objection to Dummett is that no notion of use so obtainable will be different enough from Quine's. As McDowell sees it, and I would agree, the problem with the Quinean notion is that, if we conceive of the use of language behavioristically, we will be without any explanation of its rationality, without any way of recognizing the fact that the use of language is a rational activity on the part of rational agents.[24] And, or so he suggests, a similar problem will afflict Dummett's position, that his notion of use too 'can be [no] more than a mere description of outward behaviour, with the mental. . . aspect of language use left out of account'. McDowell's view, of course, is that the only way of 'registering the role of mind' in our use of language is by describing use in terms of the contents of speech acts (McDowell, 1998c, p. 65).[25] But, or so I shall argue, once we have a proper understanding of the significance of McDowell's objection, the way to a better account will be clear.

Something like McDowell's objection is familiar from the writings of Noam Chomsky, who has argued repeatedly that Dummett's view, like any that identifies linguistic competence with a practical ability to speak a language, fails to make sufficient room for speakers' knowledge of their language (see, for example, Chomsky, 1980, ch. 2). As said earlier, if we conceive understanding as a practical ability, talk of a speaker's knowing a theory of meaning becomes a *façon de parler*, and there are a variety of reasons to think we have to take speakers' linguistic knowledge more seriously than that.

Dummett himself has not been insensitive to such concerns.[26] In some of his discussions, he expresses the worry that conceiving of understanding as a practical capacity would prohibit us from giving due recognition to the fact that speakers typically know what they mean. Thus, he notes that, on Grice's explanation of

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[24] Dummett himself emphasizes this fact: See, for example, e.g. (Dummett, 1993d, p. 104).

[25] See also McDowell (1998a). Of course, no one is suggesting that this objection would impress Quine.

[26] Just a few years after the publication of 'What Is a Theory of Meaning?' the objection I am about to rehearse in fact leads Dummett to reject the view that to understand a language is to possess a *practical* capacity to speak it. It seems fair to say, however, that Dummett has never settled upon an alternative view. Even the appeal to implicit knowledge is deemed unhelpful by the publication of *Logical Basis*.

conversational implicature, speakers' intentions play a crucial role; and speakers must know what they are saying, and what is being said to them, if Grice's account is to be correct, since only what a speaker consciously knows about the meanings of her words can play a role in the formation of her linguistic intentions. We do not recognize the same implicatures in the speech of those whose knowledge of English is poor—because they have no knowledge of the subtleties of meaning necessary for the formation of the requisite intentions (see Dummett, 1991, pp. 91–2).[27]

I do not want to quarrel with Dummett's, or Chomsky's, claim that we should   543
take speaker's knowledge of their language more seriously than Dummett was once inclined to take it. But I do not think this sort of observation goes to the root of the problem. The problem, as I understand it, does not concern any specifically linguistic knowledge we might have, either tacit or conscious, but general facts about how our use of language is integrated with our conscious mental life.[28]

It is not entirely clear what is meant by saying that understanding is a practical capacity, but the essential feature of the view, as Dummett conceives it, would appear to be that what a practical capacity is a capacity to do can be fully characterized in terms independent of the agent's conscious psychological states. Consider, for example, the ability to swim—an example of a practical capacity, if anything is. To swim is, roughly, to locomote in water, so only something capable of locomotion—a creature, let us say—is capable of swimming. But swimming is not necessarily rational action: Fish can swim, and saying that they can does not commit us to viewing them as conscious, let alone rational, creatures. That is not to say that the ability to swim is not to be explained, empirically speaking, in terms of information-processing states within a creature's mind: But there is no reason such states need be accessible to consciousness.

If the use of language were an exercise of a practical capacity in this sense, what it was to use language would be fully characterizable in terms independent of a speaker's conscious psychological states. Now, it is true that, in many respects, our ability to use language depends upon sub-personal information-processing: For example, if contemporary linguistic theory is on anything like the right track, our perception of syntactic structure is due to the functioning of complex, and largely innate, systems of whose workings we ordinarily have no conscious knowledge. But our use of language is not all like that.[29] There is a strong intuition that only

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[27] A similar point can be made about speakers with only partial knowledge of meaning: If a rheumatologist were to report that he had arthritis in his thigh, one would presumably wonder what else he actually meant to convey; but someone with only partial understanding of the term should not be so taken.

[28] For further discussion of this matter, see Heck (2005).

[29] It is for this reason that I think Chomsky's observations, valuable as they are, do not really speak

rational agents are capable of using language, that one is not *using language* unless what one says is connected, in the right kind of way, with what one thinks.

I do not mean here that one ought only to say what one believes: I mean something much more fundamental.[30] It is one thing to suppose us capable of having thoughts we are unable to express in language; but the converse, that we should be capable of expressing a content without also being able to have thoughts with that same content, is absurd.[31] If our linguistic abilities were really comparable to the ability to swim, then a sentence's having a particular content would be but a matter of our using it in a particular way, where what it was to use it in that way would be something that did not require us even to be able to have any thoughts with the content in question. But our use of language is—and if it is to count as use of | language at all, must be—integrated with our conscious mental life, at least in the minimal sense that the contents of our utterances must be able to figure in our thoughts. And the fatal problem with the conception of understanding as a practical ability is that it utterly precludes any account of this integration.[32]   544

If we are to secure language's integration with thought, we must recognize it from the very outset: As James Higginbotham puts a similar point, even if our understanding of our language consists in our capacity to use it, the relevant capacity must involve the capacity to *judge* that such-and-such under particular conditions (1994, p. xxx). This observation might well be used to motivate a quite different conception of understanding, and so a correspondingly different conception of use. On this view, our understanding of language depends upon a prior, and independent, capacity for thought, in the sense that a prior capacity to have thoughts with particular contents is required if one is to be able to use expressions with those same contents; it is this prior capacity that must be invoked if we are to explain what it is for those expressions to have those contents.

One might, indeed, be attracted to such a position for other reasons. The simplest is just that beings without language seem to be capable of having certain sorts

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to the fundamental problem: True though it may be that our use of language has to be conceived as resting upon our possession of tacit knowledge, this observation does not address the rationality of language-use, for a similar point might be made about such abilities as the ability to swim. Indeed, Chomsky himself makes just that point (1988, pp. 11–12).

[30] I am indebted here to Dummett's discussion in *Logical Basis* (1991, pp. 90–1), although it is again bound up with questions about whether we know what we mean.

[31] I am, of course, ignoring cases in which speakers utter sentences they do not understand. And one should not really say, at this point, that the thoughts need to have the *same* content: On some views, the contents of thoughts are of a different *sort* from the contents of sentences, and so the right thing to say will be that we must be able to have thoughts with appropriately related contents. See Heck (1995).

[32] Someone sympathetic with this view might try to answer this objection by making use of the sort of machinery discussed in Section 4. But once that has been done, the claim that understanding is a *purely* practical ability has been abandoned.

of thoughts: Pre-verbal children, for example, seem to be able to have thoughts about their mothers, about the colors of objects, and so forth.[33] And if that is right, it would, to say the least, be surprising if the child's developing understanding of her language did not, in some way, exploit her prior capacity for such thoughts. Moreover, there must be a connection between these thoughts and the sentences that come to express them—that, after all, is the point of the remarks about integration above—and one way to secure it will be to insist that what it is for the child to mean *red* by 'red' has to be explained in terms of her prior grasp of that very concept, in terms of a connection between her beliefs (and other attitudes) involving this concept and her use of sentences containing the word.[34]

It is important to recognize that assuming a prior grasp of content does not dispose of the meta-semantic question what it is for an expression to mean what it does. The assumption that Kurt can entertain the thought that snow is white does not, of itself, yield any answer to the question what it is for him to express that thought by means of some form of words.[35] Indeed, what Dummett takes to be the fatal objection to such views is precisely that they offer no answer to this question—none more promising, in any event, than is contained in the thought that we manage, somehow or other, to 'associate' the content with the linguistic expression (Dummett, 1993d, pp. 97–9).

But Dummett wrongly supposes that such views *can* give no answer to this question because he overlooks the fact that it is possible both to accept the priority of thought over language and to embrace the Use-Meaning Thesis: To do so, one need only insist that use be characterized in terms of the contents of mental states; we might call such a notion of use a *Gricean* one. Such a specification of the Thesis will not enable one to answer the question what content is, in general: But, on this view, the philosophy of language is not where that question ought to be answered, and the Thesis can yet play a role in an explanation of what it is for a

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[33] A common move here is to deny that pre-verbal children have anything properly called 'thoughts' at all. Dummett himself makes this move (1993c, pp. 148–9). The difficulty is that, even if this is right, it is hard to see why a capacity for proto-thought, if that is what one wants to call it, should not *still* be invoked in explaining our grasp of our most primitive concepts. Is one so sure that 'proto-thoughts' are not just non-conceptual contents by another name?

[34] One version of this view has it that a theory of truth for English is explicitly represented in our minds in the language of thought. See Segal (1994) and (1995, ch. 1). But the means of representation is not crucial here.

[35] Even if we grant that Kurt knows that 'Snow is white' is true if, and only if, snow is white, the question remains how this knowledge is to be deployed, how Kurt's having it gives rise to the linguistic abilities that manifest (even if they do not *constitute*) his competence. In principle, Kurt could have such knowledge and have no idea what the sentence means. More therefore needs to be said before even the view mentioned in the preceding note will be of any help here. For some of it, see Higginbotham (1992).

linguistic expression to mean what it does.[36] The very observation that shows that the meta-semantic questions do not vanish the moment we assume the priority of thought also shows that characterizing use in terms of the contents of mental states does not trivialize the Use-Meaning Thesis. Adopting such a characterization of use does affect the metaphysical force of the Thesis—in particular, it no longer promises a solution to the problem of intentionality—but it does not drain it of force altogether.

There are various ways a Gricean conception of use might be developed. The general thought, to put the point in Davidsonian language, is that the data available to the radical interpreter should be characterized, not in terms of the external conditions under which speakers make various utterances, but in terms of the psychological conditions (in addition, perhaps, to external ones) under which they make them. One option would be to pursue some form of Grice's program—hence my calling the notion of use in play here a Gricean one—arguing that Kurt's meaning that it was raining consisted in his uttering 'It is raining' with the intention that his audience should come to believe he believed that it was raining, by means of their recognizing his intention that they should, and so on and so forth. Another would be to pursue a proposal of Ian Rumfitt's, which makes essential use of the thought that speakers know the truth-conditions of utterances, in the sense of knowing T-sentences for them (Rumfitt, 1995). There are other possibilities, to be sure. But the question how such a position is best developed is not the one I wish to pursue here: The issue I want to discuss is a more abstract one that, I think, troubles Dummett in particular. One might worry that this way of accommodating the rationality of our use of language will commit us to an implausibly strong version of the claim that thought is prior to language. Let us grant that there are many sorts of thoughts pre-verbal children are capable of having and, moreover, that any explanation of what they mean by their most basic utterances will have to make reference to this prior capacity. It is far from obvious that anything like this is correct in general: Surely it is just false that, for *any* sentence a speaker might come to understand, she must have a prior | capacity to entertain the thought it expresses. For example, 546 it is far from clear that speakers acquire a capacity to make reference to arbitrarily distant regions of time before they acquire a capacity to use the past-tense. A similar view is yet more plausible in the case of all but the most basic mathematical notions.[37] And, even if neither of these examples is compelling, it would be unfortunate if answering McDowell's objection required us to place a bet that there are

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[36] I thus think that Dummett misunderstands Grice's intent. Dummett (1993a, pp. 171–3).

[37] Note that the question in play at this point is the *empirical* one whether we *in fact* have a prior grasp of certain contents. The mere fact that one *might* grasp the contents of certain expressions without having a means for expressing those contents does not decide the question how our *actual* understanding of those expressions is to be explained. Compare Peacocke (1997).

no better ones.

If there are sentences our understanding of which is not to be explained in terms of a prior capacity for thoughts with the same content, some notion of use other than the Gricean one will be needed. But the relevant notion of use need not be entirely meaning-free. It would, of course, undermine the purpose for which the notion of use is wanted if, in characterizing the use we make of past-tense sentences (to take them as an example) reference were made to the meanings of sentences in the past tense (which would trivialize the Use-Meaning Thesis) or to the contents of thoughts about the past (which would return us to a Gricean notion of use). But it would *not* be similarly illegitimate to make reference to the meanings of the present-tense transforms of those same sentences: The explanation of what it is for the past-tense sentences to mean what they do will have to advert to the meanings of the present-tense sentences embedded in them, since an understanding of past-tense sentences is surely parasitic upon an understanding of their present-tense transforms. And note too that we need have no qualms about making use of psychological notions, like belief, intention, or what have you, so long we do not assume that the speaker is antecedently able to have thoughts about the past. Such a notion of use—which I shall call a *Dummettian* notion—will thus not be vulnerable to McDowell's objections to the Quinean notion of use. We will be able to recognize the integration of a speaker's understanding of sentences in the past-tense with her capacity for thoughts about the past, so long as the description of use makes reference, for example, to a requirement that speakers' beliefs reflect their assertions, and those of others, in an appropriate way.

One way to develop the Dummettian notion of use might be to take as a model Peacocke's use of psychological notions in stating what he calls possession conditions: It is essential to a possession condition that it make reference to the agent's beliefs, for example; but it is just as essential that it not presuppose a capacity for beliefs whose contents contain the concept the possession condition concerns. The same sorts of moves Peacocke uses to resolve the threat of circularity in that case (Peacocke, 1992, pp. 6–10) are also available for framing a Dummettian notion of use.[38] Another option might be to formulate the requirement that the use of lan-

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[38] McDowell thinks there are serious problems with Peacocke's 'non-circularity' condition, a commitment to which amounts, in effect, to a rejection of content-laden notions of use. But I think McDowell's objections can be answered. His discussion overlooks the crucial role played by the requirement that a 'determination theory' be provided for any putative possession condition: It is this, not some need for possession conditions to be given 'within the space of reasons', that motivates rejection of the neuro-physiological condition McDowell considers in *Mind and World* (1996, pp. 167–8) It is because it is impossible to provide such a determination theory—short a type-type identity theory for concept possession, which is not even worth discussing—that such an account would have nothing to say about 'what someone thinks when she thinks that something is red'. It is *the determination theory* that specifies the content of the concept (what its semantic value is), not the

guage be integrated with thought as a general principle that does not enter into the characterization of the use of particular expressions—that is, as a general constraint on what it is for an expression | to mean anything at all, rather than as something   547
that enters into specific accounts of what it is for expressions to mean what they do. But let me not pursue this issue further here.

The overall shape of one sort of meta-semantic project based upon the Use-Meaning Thesis may thus be understood as follows: For the most fundamental parts of our language, where we have a prior capacity for thoughts with the contents in question, what it is for sentences to mean what they do will be explained in terms of some version of the Gricean notion of use; for other parts, if there are any, in terms of the Dummettian notion. To decide what notion of use to employ in specifying the Use-Meaning Thesis, we must thus decide whether, and where, thought is prior to language. There is no reason such a decision needs to be made once and for all: Although there are extreme views that merit consideration, the truth may well lie somewhere else.[39] The availability of the position just described seems to me enough to undermine McDowell's claim that, once we recognize that the view that understanding is a practical capacity is unable to account for the rationality of our use of language, our only option is to describe use in terms of the contents expressed by utterances. The Gricean conception of use is content-laden, to be sure, but it does not help itself to any notion of linguistic content—that is, it is not *meaning*-laden—and the position is designed precisely to allow us to recognize the integration of language with thought. On the other hand, however, even if this point is accepted, McDowell might still be said to have offered a compelling argument against *Dummett*. For Dummett is not prepared to employ a Gricean notion of use anywhere, since he rejects the priority of thought, arguing that it is at best useless to appeal to a speaker's prior possession of particular concepts in attempting to explain what it is for her words to express them.

It does not follow, however, that any notion of use Dummett could accept would have to be content-free, or even meaning-free: In particular, in explaining what it is for past-tense sentences to mean what they do, he could deploy a notion of use that was not meaning-free, for the reasons discussed above. In general, whenever a speaker's understanding of one (sort of) sentence depends upon a prior understand-

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possession condition on its own.

[39] One might wonder whether there is not another notion of use to be explored, one that would allow use to be characterized in terms of the *general notion* of linguistic meaning, but would not appeal to any *particular facts* about linguistic meaning—much as the Dummettian notion appeals to psychological notions, but not to our capacity for *particular thoughts*. Such a notion of use is indeed available, in principle, but one might worry that, by taking the notion of linguistic meaning for granted, it would enable us only to answer *specific* questions about what it is for words to mean what they do, and not to answer *general* questions about what it is for words to mean anything at all. But the matter is complex, and only a developed proposal would allow us to resolve it.

ing of another, it will be legitimate for Dummett to advert both to what she means by that other sentence and to her capacity for thoughts whose content it serves to express.[40]

But that is all just a sideshow. The real issue concerns what goes on at the most fundamental level. For sentences at that level—sentences our understanding of which does *not* depend upon a prior understanding of any other sentences— the notion of use we employ in explaining what it is for *those* sentences to mean what they do will have to be both meaning- and | content-free. One might well   548 worry that, at this point, Dummett is forced to turn back to the conception of understanding as a practical ability and face McDowell's objection anew. He writes that 'some [of a speaker's knowledge of her language]—the deepest and most interesting components—[consists] of a complex of acquired practices that together constitute a grasp of content'. Dummett does later deny that her understanding consists in the 'mastery of a purely external practice' (Dummett, 1991, pp. 102–3), the thought being that the practice has, so to speak, one foot in her mouth and another in her head. But he does not attain a clear conception of what this amounts to.

The reason, I think, is that he fails to distinguish the priority of thought from what we might call the priority of reason. It is one thing to say that thought is prior to language at the level of *content*: that a prior grasp of the contents of sentences needs to be invoked in explaining our understanding of them. It is entirely another to say that the general capacity for thought and reason is prior to any linguistic capacity. If we accept this latter claim, as it seems to me we must, then we are free to characterize use in terms of psychological notions, like those of belief and intention, and yet refuse to appeal to any prior capacity to entertain thoughts with the very contents expressed by our utterances. In that way, one might recognize Higginbotham's point—that the practice of speaking a language involves a capacity to judge—and yet deny that the practice must be described in terms of an antecedent capacity to entertain the contents we do judge.

What Dummett does say about the matter is, I think, also best understood in this light. Dummett says, for instance, that, to understand a sentence, I must know 'what bearing its truth may have on my actions'. In the relevant sense, though, the truth of a sentence will affect my actions only in so far as I *believe* it to be true: What I need to know, then, is what I would be believing if I were to accept the sentence as true; obviously, that presupposes that my acceptance of its truth will give rise to a belief with an appropriate content.[41] But if that is the sort of view

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[40] Of course, it is here essential that our language have a certain sort of hierarchical structure—that, *modulo* local holisms, an ordering of the sentences in terms of whether an understanding of the one depends upon an understanding of the other will be a partial ordering.

[41] See here Heck (1995), where I argue that this principle is required for different sorts of rea-

Dummett envisages, then what he ought to say is that a Dummettian notion of use is to be employed throughout; this will yield a notion of use, at the most fundamental level that, although content-free, is still non-behavioristic and, for that very reason, allows us to recognize the integration of language and thought.[42]

If we understand Dummett as I have just suggested we should, then his project survives the objections McDowell brings against him. Of course, one might be skeptical that a Dummettian notion of use, at the most fundamental level, can be developed in detail. I have my doubts myself. My point here, though, is that the charge of behaviorism—which is so often brought against Dummett, with a footnote to McDowell's papers—can not be sustained, at least not on the basis of the sorts of general considerations | McDowell develops: No principled reason has emerged that Dummett should be unable to make room for the rationality of language-use.

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4   Closing: The Epistemology of Understanding and the Priority of Thought

As I said at the outset, McDowell suggests that Dummett's rejection of meaning-laden notions of use is motivated by a flawed epistemology of understanding. I have rejected this reading. But there are, of course, several passages in Dummett's writings on which one might reasonably base such an interpretation—passages where Dummett deploys arguments that certainly do look like epistemological ones in support of the claim that the notion of use should be content-free. In closing, I should like to offer, from our present vantage point, an account of the role these arguments play in Dummett's thought.

Illustrating these arguments, McDowell asks us to imagine that Martians speak a language that sounds like English but differs from it semantically: Expressions in Martian do not always mean what their English homophones mean (McDowell, 1998b, p. 244). Dummett's claim about such a case would be that, if meaning were not determined by use—conceived in uniformly Dummettian terms—it might be impossible for us ever to recognize the semantic differences between the languages. Suppose that the Martians' use of their language, so conceived, was in relevant re-

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sons, namely, that the only argument for the claim that the meaning of an expression determines its reference rests upon it.

[42] What obscures this point, I think, is Dummett's acceptance of a broadly Davidsonian, 'interpretive' philosophy of mind. If one puts the two views together, as it were, use will be described in terms that do not make use of notions like belief, but instead incorporate the interpretive story about what belief is. Nonetheless, even if one does accept such a view, it is worth separating it out from the view about how use should be characterized: The two are quite independent.

spects exactly like ours,[43] not just actually but counterfactually, too: Whatever semantic differences there might be between the languages then could never be revealed in anything we could glean from the Martians' speech. A Gricean could reply that the differences would yet consist in differences between the contents of the Martians' thoughts and ours, and that it might still be possible to give an account of that difference.[44] But, by hypothesis, the differences between the contents of their thoughts and ours would be epiphenomenal, as far as their speech is concerned, and Dummett regards that situation as intolerable. Ordinarily, we take ourselves to *know*, on the basis of how someone uses language, what she means by her words. And yet, in this case, no amount of ordinary probing could reveal our mistaken assumption that the Martians mean what we do. Are we not forced to conclude that the grounds on which we ordinarily judge what someone means are insufficient? or, alternatively, 'that faith is required if we are to believe that we communicate with one another' (Dummett, 1993a, p. 177)? Better, says Dummett, to accept that meaning is determined by use, in his sense.

McDowell's view is that such arguments are what underlie Dummett's rejection of meaning-laden notions of use. But to say so is to misidentify their target. | The argument we just considered is directed not against *meaning*-laden notions of use but against *content*-laden notions of use, in particular, against the claim that the right way to specify the Use-Meaning Thesis is in terms of a Gricean notion of use:[45] The target, that is to say, is the thesis that thought is prior to language. It is in response to this argument—perhaps surprisingly, an argument for a claim with which he actually agrees—that McDowell's epistemological observations are properly deployed. The case of the Martians is indeed analogous, in relevant re-   550

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[43] It won't really be exactly like ours, of course: there may be vocabulary differences, and externalist constraints might imply that their word 'water' means twater. But these kinds of differences are presumably ones that *could* become apparent.

[44] Another reply would be that, even on a Gricean view, the case is impossible—i.e., that, though meaning does not *consist* in use, described in Dummettian terms, differences in meaning nevertheless will always lead to potential differences in use. Note that this reply in effect concedes that meaning is, in some sense, determined by Dummettian use, a claim that may still be strong enough for the anti-realist challenge to get off the ground. In any event, it is this weaker claim for which I would suggest the name 'The Manifestation Constraint', familiar from discussions of Dummett's writings. A speaker's linguistic capacities *manifest* what she means in the sense that her having those capacities demands explanation in terms of her having particular semantic knowledge so that, even if her meaning what she does by her words is to be explained in terms of a prior capacity for thought, what she means will still be fixed by the use she makes of her language.

[45] The quotation at the end of the last paragraph, for example, occurs in a discussion of the view that understanding consists in tacit knowledge of a theory of truth (Dummett, 1993a, pp. 174–81). More specifically, the target is Chomsky's view that, as Dummett puts it, 'language is primarily a vehicle of thought, and only secondarily an instrument of communication' (Dummett, 1993a, p. 176).

spects, to the argument from illusion in the philosophy of perception. And we may follow now familiar responses to the argument from illusion and deny that the mere possibility that there could be such a language, one we could not distinguish from English on the basis of the evidence upon which we ordinarily base our beliefs, shows that our ordinary beliefs about what utterances mean do not constitute knowledge (McDowell, 1998b, p. 244). I think that response exactly right.

In any event, it is Dummett's rejection of content-laden notions of use that is epistemologically driven, not his rejection of meaning-laden ones.[46]

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