

Davidson and Wittgenstein – a Homeric Struggle?

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In *Meaning and Truth* (1970) P.F. Strawson famously contrasts two approaches to the question of what it is for words to have meaning: That of communication-intention theorists (represented by Grice, Austin and the later Wittgenstein) and that of formal semantics theorists (represented by Chomsky, Davidson, Frege and the earlier Wittgenstein).¹ The conflict between communication-intention theories and formal semantics, Strawson argues, is a conflict concerning what role the notion of communication is to play in our philosophical account of meaning: Theories of the former sort place the notion of communication at the center, whereas formal semantics theories fail to do so. While Strawson holds that both approaches have their merits, his aim is to show that the communication-intention theorist is closer to the truth. Only a theory that takes *conventions* to play a central role in the account of meaning will be able to secure the essential link between linguistic meaning and communication.

According to Strawson, therefore, the later Wittgenstein and Davidson end up on opposite sides in this struggle. Several contemporary Wittgenstein scholars agree, among them Hans-Johann Glock and Meredith Williams. According to them Wittgenstein puts forth an essentially social picture of language, with the shared conventions at the center, while Davidson defends an individualistic picture that ultimately fails to account for the public nature of language. I shall argue that this description is importantly mistaken. Naturally, there are many significant differences between Davidson and Wittgenstein. For instance, Davidson believed in the project of formal semantics – the project of trying to formulate a systematic

¹ Reprinted in Strawson 1971.

theory describing the semantics of a language – and Wittgenstein did not. However, when it comes to the foundational or metasemantic question, Davidson and Wittgenstein are close: They both subscribe to the idea that meaning is determined by use, rather than by conventions, and they both take meaning to be essentially public and tied to its role in communication. There is no struggle here. Strawson is simply wrong to suggest that securing the public nature of meaning requires appealing to conventions.

The paper is divided into three main sections. The first sets the stage by presenting Davidson's view on conventions and communication. In the second I sketch what I take to be the proper picture of the development of Wittgenstein's view of meaning and rules leading up to the rule-following remarks in the *Investigations*. I argue that these remarks in fact are directed *against* the idea that language is an essentially rule-guided activity and I criticize the alternative, conventionalist reading of Wittgenstein defended by Glock. In the third section I discuss whether, nevertheless, there is a sense in which Wittgenstein takes the shared social practice to be essential to meaning, focusing on the arguments of Glock and Williams. In particular, I discuss whether Wittgenstein's appeal to agreement shows him to be a conventionalist about meaning.

1. Davidson on conventions

It is commonly taken for granted that securing the public nature of language requires an appeal to shared conventions. This assumption is quite clear in Strawson's reasoning.

On a truth conditional account of meaning, he says, the relevant semantic rules are not rules for communicating since they simply determine the truth conditions of the sentences of the language. This implies, Strawson argues, that someone may "understand a language competently", have perfect linguistic competence, without using language as a means of communication (Strawson 1971, 172). It would follow that it is a contingent truth that the

rules that determine the meanings of the sentences of a language are social or conventional, and that there is no principled reason why it could not be the case that “every individual might have his own language which only he understands” (Strawson 1971, 187). In order to avoid this, according to Strawson, the semantic rules must be understood in terms of the speaker’s communication intentions – as conventionalized ways of using language with the purpose of letting the audience know that one has a certain belief.

However, the claim that a truth conditional semantics implies that a speaker could have a language without being able to use it in communication, reflects a failure to keep the different semantic projects apart. Securing the public nature of meaning need not go via the semantics, construing meaning in terms of ‘rules for communicating’, but could go via the *metasemantics*.² In particular, it is quite possible to combine a truth conditional theory of meaning with a metasemantic theory of meaning that puts communication at the center. No one provides a better illustration of this than Davidson.

At the foundation of Davidson’s philosophy of language, famously, lie two questions: What could we know that would enable us to interpret a speaker’s words? And how could we know it? (Davidson 1973, 125). These two questions correspond to the project of semantics on the one hand, and to the metasemantic project on the other. Davidson’s answer to the first question involves an appeal to a recursive Tarskian truth theory, and his answer to the second an appeal to radical interpretation. That is to say, Davidson holds that by providing an account of how the radical interpreter could reach an interpretation of a speaker’s words ‘from scratch’, without having any prior knowledge of the language spoken, we can reach an answer to the question of what determines meaning. By putting the interpreter at center Davidson brings out his commitment to the idea that meaning is *public*: There is nothing more to meaning than what a radical interpreter can discern (once all the

² For the distinction between semantics (sometimes called descriptive semantics) and metasemantics, see Stalnaker 1997. The semantic theory assigns semantic values to the expressions used whereas the metasemantic theory provides an account of the facts in virtue of which the expressions have certain semantic values.

evidence is in). The publicity of meaning therefore lies at the foundation of Davidson's project and is built into his metasemantics through the device of the radical interpreter.

The basic evidence for the interpreter is the speaker's holding uninterpreted sentences true (and false) in various contexts. However, what a speaker holds true is the result both of what she believes and of the meaning of her words. The interpreter therefore needs to solve what Davidson calls the problem of the interdependence of meaning and belief. For instance, if Kurt utters 'Es regnet' when it is snowing there are two possibilities: He is mistaken about the weather (and his sentence is true if and only if it is raining) or his sentence is true if and only if it is snowing. How can the interpreter, on the basis simply of Kurt's assent, determine which is the correct interpretation? Davidson proposes that the principle of charity can solve the problem by making assumptions about the nature of belief: On the assumption that there is large overlap in beliefs between speaker and interpreter, such that the speaker (by and large) holds a sentence true when it is true (by the interpreter's lights), and that the speaker is (by and large) rational, the belief component can be held 'steady', allowing the interpreter to take the speaker's holding a sentence true as evidence that it *is* true.³ The principle of charity therefore functions as a principle of meaning determination, mapping facts about use on to meanings in such a way that the speaker comes out as (by and large) rational and holding true beliefs.⁴ It cannot be applied piecemeal, however, and is not meant to eliminate error. Taking Kurt's overall use into account it may be that the interpretation that provides the best fit with the evidence, minimizing inexplicable error, entails that Kurt's utterance is mistaken. The aim, Davidson writes, is not the absurd one of making disagreement and error disappear:

The point is rather that widespread agreement is the only possible background against which disputes and mistakes can be interpreted. Making sense of the utterances and

³ For a discussion of the problem of meaning and belief and the principle of charity see for instance Davidson 1973, 1974a and 1974b.

⁴ Cf. Kathrin Glüer's contribution to this volume, pp....

behavior of others, even their most aberrant behavior, requires us to find a great deal of reason and truth in them (Davidson 1974b, 153).

While Davidson takes meaning to be essentially public he denies that this implies that conventions are essential to meaning.⁵ The attempt to account for meaning in terms of conventions, Davidson says, is an expression of the view that there is a connection between linguistic meaning and human attitudes described in non-linguistic terms. The hope is that by appealing to the speaker's ulterior purposes (purposes that can be characterized without relying on the notion of literal meaning) we can get an account of literal meaning (Davidson 1982, 266). This, as we have seen, is Strawson's strategy. Davidson is happy to grant that there are important connections between what a speaker's words mean and his non-linguistic intentions and beliefs. However, he does not think these connections can be used to provide an account of meaning. One reason for this derives from considerations having to do with the public nature of meaning.⁶ Discussing the strategy of explaining linguistic meaning on the basis of non-linguistic intentions (which, as it happens, he ascribes to Wittgenstein), Davidson argues that this fails since we cannot make detailed sense of a person's intentions and beliefs independently of making sense of his utterance (Davidson 1974b, 143). He puts the point in terms of radical interpretation, arguing that when it comes to radical interpretation there is no hope of appealing to the speaker's intentions and beliefs as part of the evidence: "If this is so, then an inventory of sophisticated beliefs and intentions cannot be the evidence for the truth of a theory for interpreting his speech behavior" (Davidson 1974b, 144).

It is natural to object that, nevertheless, there are linguistic regularities and these are essential to communication. For this to be an interesting claim, Davidson stresses, it

⁵ Davidson raises a range of objections to this thesis, especially in 'Communication and Convention' (1982). I shall focus on the objections that concern the public nature of meaning and its role in communication.

⁶ Another reason concerns what Davidson calls 'the autonomy of meaning'; the idea that meaning need be independent of ulterior purposes since a sentence can be uttered with any number of such purposes without its meaning changing (Davidson 1982).

cannot simply amount to the truism that successful communication implies that speaker and hearer have understood the speaker's words the same way. Rather, the claim must be that communication requires that speaker and hearer assign the same meaning to their words *in advance*, prior to their linguistic interaction. And this, Davidson argues, is simply not the case. Shared conventions are neither sufficient, nor necessary for communication. That shared conventions are not sufficient, Davidson suggests, is illustrated by the fact that there is a multitude of situations where a speaker uses her words in a non-standard way and yet manages to communicate, such as cases of malapropisms, neologisms, slips of the tongue and simple misunderstandings.⁷ In these cases communication requires going beyond the standard meaning and we normally do this without trouble. For instance, when Archie Bunker utters 'Let's have some laughter to break up the monogamy' we have no trouble understanding that he is suggesting that we should have some laughter to break up the monotony. That shared conventions are not necessary is shown by the possibility of radical interpretation, where the interpreter manages to understand the speaker without any shared conventions being in place. Naturally, for the speaker to be interpretable he needs to use his words in fairly regular and stable ways, but this does not mean that there need be any *shared* regularities involved.

Davidson's rejection of the appeal to conventions, therefore, is not a reflection of his not taking the role of meaning in communication seriously. On the contrary, it is precisely because he takes the central function of meaning to be that of explaining successful communication that he denies that conventions are essential to meaning: Since there can be successful communication without shared conventions, it follows that linguistic meaning cannot be identified with conventional meaning.⁸ Davidson does not thereby deny that language is a social art, or that people adjust their language use to cohere with that of others.

⁷ See especially Davidson 1986.

⁸ Cf. Glüer 2012. Discussing Davidson's view on conventions she writes: "It is because linguistic meaning is essentially public that neither convention nor any other form of shared regularity in the use of linguistic expressions is necessary for successful communication" (2013, 339).

He merely holds that this does not tell us anything essential about the nature of language or linguistic communication (Davidson 1982, 278). Nor does he deny that shared regularities make for *ease* of communication and therefore are of great practical importance. Common conditioning ensures, up to a point, that the same method of interpretation that we use for others will work for a new a speaker. As Davidson puts it, knowledge of shared regularities are a ‘crutch’ to interpretation – a crutch we could in theory have done without from the start (Davidson 1982, 279).

While Davidson is squarely in the anti-conventionalist camp, therefore, he nevertheless holds meaning to be essentially public. Strawson’s picture of the struggle is misleading since it presupposes that rejecting the importance of conventions is equivalent to giving up on the essential link between meaning and communication. Next, let us see which camp Wittgenstein belongs to. To do this, I shall start by critically examining Hans-Johan Glock’s reading of the later Wittgenstein as a convention theorist.

2. Wittgenstein on conventions

Part and parcel of Glock’s account of the later Wittgenstein as a convention theorist is a certain interpretation of the development of Wittgenstein’s views on rules from the *Tractatus* on. Here, in brief, is Glock’s story (1996, 2010). In the middle period linguistic norms come to play a central role in Wittgenstein’s philosophy. For example, in texts from the early 1930’s Wittgenstein stresses that we do not regard language from the perspective of a mechanism, but from that of a calculus, a normative perspective. The big difference between the *Tractatus* and Wittgenstein’s middle period, is that Wittgenstein comes to reject the idea of a complex set of inexorable norms hidden behind the surface of natural languages, moving towards a picture of the relevant norms as conventions guiding our linguistic use.

Wittgenstein did therefore not abandon the *Tractatus* appeal to linguistic rules, but modified it

and insisted that rules cannot guide linguistic behavior without being known to us. It is for this reason that Wittgenstein suggests the comparison with language and games: This analogy was meant to bring out that linguistic understanding involves mastery of techniques concerning the application of rules, stressing the social dimension of using language. The *Tractatus* conception of rules was therefore replaced in the middle period texts with a down-to-earth conception of rules, rejecting the intellectualist view of rule-following as involving the consultation and interpretation of rule formulations. This culminates in Wittgenstein's rule-following considerations in the *Philosophical Investigations* 201, and the notorious paradox that "no course of action could be determined by a rule, since every course of action could be made out to accord with the rule". To avoid the paradox we just have to give up the idea that being guided by a rule involves interpretation, and to see that it involves a commitment to a shared practice.

There is much that is wrong with this picture of the development of Wittgenstein's thoughts. In a joint paper, Kathrin Glüer and I have tried to spell this out (2010). Here are the essentials of the alternative picture we argued for.

First, it is not clear that norms play any role at all in the *Tractatus*. While Wittgenstein appeals to the rules of logical syntax these do not function as norms or guiding rules: Wittgenstein does not distinguish between rules and laws and he suggests that the question of how we follow these rules is philosophically irrelevant (see for instance *Tractatus* 4.0141 and 4.002). When rules come to the center in the middle period texts, this is not because he now has a different conception of rule-following, but because he is starting to question logical atomism, in particular the idea that all elementary propositions are independent of one another.⁹ He argues that there needs to be rules spelling out the internal connections between propositions and he proposes that meaning is to be understood in terms

⁹ See for example Wittgenstein 1980, 74, and Wittgenstein 1975, § 76-86.

of a set of grammatical rules, a ‘calculus’: “I want to say the place of a word in grammar is its meaning” (Wittgenstein 1974, § 23).

Second, the picture of meaning and rules that emerges in the middle period stands in contrast not only to the *Tractatus* but also to the later texts. Glock is simply wrong to suggest that there is a smooth transition from the middle period view on rules to that of the *Investigations*. And the change concerns precisely the idea that meaning can be understood in terms of guidance by rules. In the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein could dismiss the question of rule-guidance as philosophically irrelevant, since the rules of logical syntax were said to reflect the intrinsic nature of the world and were not of our own making. Once a sign was projected on to an object, the system of rules would simply kick in, whether the speaker was aware of it or not. By contrast, the rules of grammar in the middle period texts are said to be conventional or arbitrary, like the rules of a game. They are ‘autonomous’, not accountable to reality, since they themselves determine the meaning of the expression used. If so, however, it is essential to say something about the facts in virtue of which certain conventions hold rather than some other, equally arbitrary, conventions. Wittgenstein’s proposal is that they do so in virtue of the speaker’s following these rules. My use of signs, he says, is in accordance with any number of rules, but what makes representation possible is the fact that I am *guided* by a particular rule, that a particular rule is *involved* in my use.¹⁰ Only then can there be a distinction between acting correctly (in accordance with the rule) and acting incorrectly. As a result, it becomes essential to Wittgenstein to say something about how meaning rules guide speakers. And this is what gets him into trouble.

In order to account for rule-guidance Wittgenstein appeals to the central role of speaker intentions. While the speaker’s use of signs may be in accordance with any number of rules, Wittgenstein suggests, the rule that he follows is the rule he *intends* to follow. The

¹⁰ See especially Wittgenstein 1974, § 50-61, and Wittgenstein 1980, 37-38.

intention *contains* the general rule determining whether the application is correct or incorrect (Wittgenstein 1974, § 58). “If you exclude the element of intention from language”, Wittgenstein writes, “its whole function then collapses” (Wittgenstein 1975, § 20).¹¹ The trouble is that at the same time he is arguing that following a rule cannot be accounted for in terms of mental events and processes. He argues that we do not have rules running through our heads and, moreover, that even if we did this would involve rule expressions, such as charts, and these can always be interpreted in different ways.¹² Wittgenstein here anticipates the rule-following discussion in the *Investigations*, arguing that appealing to rules in the mind of the speaker would lead to an infinite regress of one rule expression interpreting the next. How, then, could an appeal to intentions help?¹³

It is against this background, Kathrin Glüer and I have suggested, that we need to read the famous remarks on rule-following in the *Investigations*. We think Wittgenstein is quite right to suggest that intentions are essential to rule-guidance. The difference between acting in accordance with a rule and being guided by it, we have argued, consists in the rule playing a role in the speaker’s reasoning, in her intending to do what the rule requires – what we have called the ‘intention-reason view’ of rule-following (or the IR-view) (Glüer and Wikforss 2010, 157-158). However, our claim is, precisely because of this we should question the idea that rule-guidance underlies the very basis of all human activity, thought and language. Although much of human life is rule-guided, that which makes rule-guidance possible in the first place, is not itself based on guidance by rules. And we have proposed that this is precisely the conclusion that Wittgenstein came to in his famous rule-following remarks in the *Investigations*. The very point of these remarks is that speaking a language is

¹¹ See also Wittgenstein 1974, § 95-99.

¹² See for instance Wittgenstein 1974, §2, §9, §11, §13, §60, §98-99, §104, §112 and Wittgenstein 1980, 24, 44, 48, 50, 50, 67-68.

¹³ Wittgenstein’s comment in *Investigations* § 205 can be read in the light of this, as referring to a view he once held himself: “But it is just the queer thing about intention, about the mental process, that the existence of a custom, a technique, is not necessary to it”.

not an essentially rule-guided activity: What determines meaning is not that speakers are guided by certain rules – that would lead to a regress of interpretations of the very sort that Wittgenstein struggles with in the middle period texts. Instead, what determines meaning is *use*, the *practice* of applying terms. This, we have suggested, is the real significance of his much discussed remark in *Investigations* §198 that interpretations by themselves do not determine meaning, and it is the real import of his dictum that meaning is use.¹⁴

By contrast, Glock's claim that there is a smooth transition from Wittgenstein's middle period view on meaning and rules to the *Investigations* faces some serious textual challenges. If indeed the later Wittgenstein thought that conventions were essential to meaning one would have thought that he would mention that or, at least, that the notion of conventions would play a central role in the *Investigations* (as it does in the middle period texts) but conventions are barely mentioned.¹⁵ Not surprisingly, when Glock cites textual evidence in support of his claim that the later Wittgenstein takes conventions to be essential to meaning, it is all coming from the middle period texts, such as *Waismann Dictations* (early 1930's), *Philosophical Grammar* (1933), Wittgenstein's Cambridge Lectures 1932-35, and *The Big Typescript* (1933).

Moreover, the claim that Wittgenstein held on to the idea that meaning involves guidance by rules, is in tension with other central ideas in the later writings. First, Glock accepts the IR-conception of rule-following – i.e. that if an agent follows a rule in doing A,

¹⁴ Horwich 2012 suggests a rather different interpretation according to which Wittgenstein's dictum should be understood as a perfectly obvious definition, as trivial as the synonymy of 'bachelor' and 'unmarried man' (2012, 105). This is implausible for several reasons. First, one would be hard pressed to find a dictionary which takes 'meaning' to be synonymous with 'use'. Second, Horwich at the same time ascribes to Wittgenstein the thesis that meaning is *determined* by use (ibid. 107, 109), where the determination relation is understood as an 'in virtue' relation. This is in line with what I am suggesting here but it is not, of course, a mere trivial definition but a substantial metasemantic theory.

¹⁵ One of the few places where 'convention' occurs in the *Investigations* is paragraph 355 where Wittgenstein writes of the language of sense-impressions that "this language like any other is founded on convention". If one looks to the German, however, the word used is 'Übereinkunft' which simply means agreement. Glock notes that the term employed is 'Übereinkunft' and suggests that "it is even more blatant in its intersubjective connotations than *Konvention*" (2010, 101). This may well be, but intersubjectivity is distinct from rulishness. Below I shall return to the role of agreement in Wittgenstein's later writings.

the rule must be part of his reason for doing A – and suggests that this was Wittgenstein’s view. The rule, Glock writes, must be part of the agent’s reason for acting: “He must intend to follow the rule” (Glock 1996, 325). The question is how Glock thinks it can be combined with another central theme in the *Investigations* – Wittgenstein’s rejection of the Augustinian idea that thought is prior to language (Wittgenstein 1953, § 32). If linguistic meaning is determined by the speaker following certain rules, and rule-following requires intentions, then thought must be prior to, and independent of, language. Second, Glock even suggests that following a rule involves being able to *cite* the rule as a reason, justifying his action (Glock 1996, 325). However, it is a central idea in Wittgenstein’s later philosophy that we are not able to cite the rules of grammar. Indeed, this precisely why we get into trouble philosophically: “Our grammar is lacking in this sort of perspicuity” (Wittgenstein 1953, §122). Something has to give. And, Kathrin Glüer and I argue, what has to give is the assumption that meaning is determined by the speaker’s being guided by certain rules.¹⁶

These tensions remain in Glock’s more recent papers on Wittgenstein. Glock 2010 defends a conventionalist view of meaning (ascribing it to Wittgenstein) against an individualist view (which he ascribes to Davidson). Glock defines a convention as a shared, arbitrary rule: It is a *rule* because it provides reasons for regular behavior either directly or because of sanctions, it is *shared* because deviations are subject to normative reactions, and it is *arbitrary* because a different rule might have been adopted. The appeal to sanctions suggests lowering the bar for rule-following, since it suggests that the rule may provide a reason ‘indirectly’, and so need not be involved in the subject’s reasoning in any high-profile sense. And Glock argues that although applying sanctions does presuppose having some primitive intentional attitudes towards the behavior of others, sanctions can be understood

¹⁶ Although Wittgenstein holds on to the idea of ‘rules of grammar’, and develops in up until *On Certainty*, these emerge not as guiding rules that speakers follow, as conventions, but are construed as very basic judgments that play a special role in our language insofar as they cannot be given up without a change in meaning. As philosophers we fail to notice the special role of these judgments and this leads to conceptual confusions.

without reference to intentions, as mere adverse reactions to a deviation from a regularity. The idea, thus, is that there can be *implicit* rules that guide behavior, without having been consciously consulted (Glock 2010, 94-96).¹⁷

However, a subject may perform an action because she is afraid of sanctions if she does not do so, even if there is no rule involved at all.¹⁸ If indeed Glock wishes to hold on to the important distinction between acting in accordance with a rule and being guided by it, then the rule has to enter into the explanation of what the subject did, as a reason – just as his IR-view suggests. And as Kathrin Glüer and I have argued elsewhere, the appeal to implicit rules does not help (Glüer & Wikforss 2009, 59-63). No doubt, that a rule functions as a reason does not require that it is very explicitly formulated. However, as Quine stressed, if linguistic conventions determine meaning they *could not* even be formulated prior to their adoption and this undermines their explanatory force. Things are even worse if one, like Wittgenstein (and Davidson), denies that thought is prior to language. Then the conventions are such that the agent cannot even *intend* to follow them prior to having a language.¹⁹ What, then, remains of the crucial difference between being guided by a rule and merely acting in accordance with one?

Not only, therefore, is the textual evidence in support of Glock's conventionalist reading of the later Wittgenstein scant. This reading is also in tension with ideas of Wittgenstein's that there *is* textual evidence for. Much more plausible, I submit, is the conclusion that although Wittgenstein once held that meaning is determined by the speaker's being guided by rules, he later came to reject this very idea.

¹⁷ Cf. Horwich 2012, 118-122.

¹⁸ Moreover, the appeal to sanctions does not solve the regress problem (assuming that is Glock's intention) since the question remains whether a particular sanctioning was done correctly. See Glüer & Wikforss 2009a, 62-63.

¹⁹ Glock also suggests that we should reject Davidson's claim that beliefs and intentions presuppose language: "nonlinguistic creatures can have not just beliefs and intentions, but also beliefs and intentions concerning the beliefs and intentions of others" (Glock 2010, 95). This of course eliminates all worries concerning how conventions determine meaning. However, it also means that Wittgenstein's regress argument is stopped short. It is presumably because this is an idea at odds with Wittgenstein that Glock falls back on the appeal to implicit rule-following.

3. Meaning and agreement

3.1. The argument from normativity

In the discussion following the paradox of paragraph 201, Wittgenstein famously suggests that human agreement is essential to language. For example, in paragraph 242 he writes: “If language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also (queer as this may sound) in judgments”. This has been taken by some of Wittgenstein’s interpreters to show that on his view meaning is essentially social.

Wittgenstein’s idea, it is suggested, is that what is required to secure the distinction between correctness and incorrectness is precisely an appeal to human *agreement* – that is, to the larger social practice of using a language. Even, therefore, if it is right that Wittgenstein does not hold that speaking a language requires being *guided* by rules, it is nevertheless the case that he takes the shared, social practice to be essential to linguistic meaning. Coming back to the struggle at hand, if this reading is correct, there is still a fundamental conflict between the outlook of Davidson and that of Wittgenstein: While Wittgenstein takes the shared social practice to be essential to meaning, Davidson denies this.

This is the line defended by Meredith Williams (1999, 2000). Williams acknowledges that Davidson pays attention to the social aspect of language, but she argues that his conception of the sociality of language is tied to a very different idea than Wittgenstein’s conception of this. Whereas Wittgenstein endorses the ‘practice view’, requiring shared conventions and conformity of behavior among the participants, Davidson endorses the ‘interpretive view’, requiring merely mutual interpretability. Davidson appeals to the public character of language but only in the sense that language use provides evidence for the interpreter, while Wittgenstein takes language use to *constitute* meaning and understanding. This, Williams suggests, reflects profound differences in their conceptions of

language: “Davidson’s account of language remains highly intellectualized and individualist, wedded to the view that the defining mark of language is its inherent systematicity and infinite productivity. Wittgenstein’s picture, on the other hand, emphasizes the nonrational basis of language, and our shared practical ‘conventions’” (Williams 2000, 301). And, she argues, Wittgenstein was right – language is essentially social.

Williams’ central argument in support of this turns on considerations having to do with how genuine normativity arises. An isolated individual could behave in all sorts of complex ways, she argues, but there would be no room for normativity unless her actions could be measured against the larger practice of the community. There can be norms, standards, only against the background of group harmony. That is the point Wittgenstein is making when appealing to the importance of agreement. Wittgenstein’s central claim, according to Williams, is that the very idea of normativity, the structure within which the distinction between correct and incorrect can be drawn, cannot get a foothold unless the practice is a social one: “conformity of behavior is required for a normative contrast between correct and incorrect to get a foothold” (Williams 2000, 312).²⁰

A similar idea can be found in Glock 2010. Like Williams, Glock suggests that there is a fundamental conflict between Davidson and Wittgenstein and that this conflict turns on the role of the social practice. And like Williams, Glock stresses the essentially normative nature of meaning, distinguishing between two normativity theses: bare normativity of meaning (BNM) and rule-based normativity of meaning (RNM). According to (BNM) meaning is normative since there is an essential connection between meaning and correctness conditions – if a word is meaningful there must be conditions for its correct application. Thesis (RNM) is stronger, and requires that correctness conditions are determined by rules guiding the speaker’s use of terms. According to Glock, again, Wittgenstein subscribes to

²⁰ See also Williams 1999, 174-75.

both theses, and it is in order to account for rule-guidance that he appeals to the essential role of the social practice (Glock 2010, 90). The point is not that speaking correctly can be identified with speaking as the majority does, but that “literal meaning is bound up with the notion of a linguistic mistake as a deviation from a shared norm, and hence with the notion of a convention” (Glock 2010, 111).²¹

The distinction between (BNM) and (RNM) corresponds to the distinction drawn in Glüer & Wikforss 2009, between (ME)-normativism and (MD)-normativism. The first thesis says that facts about meaning (in themselves and essentially) have implications for how a speaker should use her terms – meaning *engenders* certain norms.²² The second thesis is a meta-semantic thesis, according to which meaning is *determined* by the speaker’s following certain rules. I have already argued against the suggestion that Wittgenstein subscribes to MD-normativism, i.e. to Glock’s thesis (RNM). The question now is whether he subscribes to ME-normativism (thesis BNM) and whether this shows that he takes the social practice to be essential to meaning.

Leaving Wittgenstein for a moment, let us consider the argument as such – i.e. the claim that because there must be semantic correctness conditions, meaning is normative in a sense that makes it essentially dependent on the larger social practice. It seems plausible enough that there is a certain type of normativity that can only arise in a community context. Consider Robinson Crusoe, only a wilder one who has never lived in a human society. When he eats he fails to live up to all human conventions of eating, and eats like an animal. Is his eating incorrect? Does he violate any conventions of eating? Hardly. His way of eating is

²¹ It is not easy to see precisely what thesis Glock wishes to ascribe to Wittgenstein. Unlike Williams, he rejects the community reading of Wittgenstein according to which Wittgenstein held that meaning is necessarily social. At the same time he suggests that conventions are essential to meaning and that Wittgenstein regarded rule-following and language as *typically* social (Glock 2010, 101). However, that language is typically social is an empirical claim – a claim that no one will dispute and that does not tell us anything about the nature of meaning.

²² Glock does not spell this out in terms of *oughts* but in terms of *permissions*. Nevertheless, (BNM) qualifies as a type of ME-normativism since the claim is precisely that meaning in itself, and essentially, has normative implications (see footnote 25 below).

neither correct, nor incorrect unless we think of him as being part of a social practice. The question is, can a similar reasoning be applied to the issue of semantic correctness conditions: Is it the case that the distinction between correct and incorrect usage requires an appeal to the wider social practice?²³

The decisive question, it should be clear, is whether there is a connection between semantic correctness and normativity, as Glock's thesis (BNM) presupposes. What is beyond dispute is that there is an essential connection between linguistic meaning and semantic correctness conditions. This is just a way of capturing the basic semantic relation between word and world: If an expression is meaningful, then there is a difference between the conditions under which the term does apply and the conditions under which it does not. As Wittgenstein puts it, there must be a difference between what is right (semantically correct) and what merely seems right to the speaker. However, Kathrin Glüer and I have argued, the fact that an expression has semantic correctness conditions does not have any normative implications.²⁴ Thus, we have questioned the move from a statement of correctness conditions, such as (C), to a normative statement, such as (N):

(C) For any speaker *S*, and any time *t*: if 'green' means *green* for *S* at *t*, then it is correct for *S* to apply 'green' to an object *x* iff *x* is green at *t*.

(N) For any speaker *S*, and any time *t*: if 'green' means *green* for *S* at *t*, then *S* ought to apply 'green' to an object *x* iff *x* is green at *t*.²⁵

We are happy to grant that there are some construals of 'correct' that are normative. The important point however, is that the relevant notion of correctness in this context is that of

²³ There is of course one notion of linguistic correctness that does require appeal to the social practice: that of using a word like others do. However, this is distinct from the notion of semantic correctness that is our concern here.

²⁴ See especially Glüer 1999, Wikforss 2001 and Glüer & Wikforss 2009b and 2015.

²⁵ There are alternative formulations of (N), for instance in terms of permissions rather than oughts, and Glock follows this (Glock 2010, 98-99). Notice, however, that the anti-normativist rejects these versions of (N) as well, insisting that semantic correctness conditions do not have normative implications of *any* sort (see below).

semantic correctness and that is not a normative notion. How semantic correctness conditions are construed depends on the choice of the basic semantic concept, such as *truth* or *warranted assertibility*. Either way, we have argued, the notion of semantic correctness is non-normative in precisely the sense that no statements about what we ought (not) to or may (not) do with *w* directly follow from (C). Assuming that ‘green’ is true of green objects only it does not follow that the subject ought to apply ‘green’ in certain ways. If she applies ‘green’ to a red object she has made a false statement but she has not violated any semantic rules.

Glock shows awareness of this objection, but argues that BNM “marks a straightforward normative dimension of meaning” (Glock 2010, 96-97). The anti-normativists, he suggests, have conflated empirical propositions such as “In English, it is correct to apply ‘drake’ to an object *x* iff *x* is a male duck” with the norm proposition “It is correct to apply ‘drake’ to an object *x* iff *x* is a male duck”. Since the latter functions as an explanation it has a normative function, laying down conditions under which ‘drake’ can be meaningfully applied to an object *x* (Glock 2010, 97). These lexical norms are to be understood as a type of constitutive, permissive norms, giving the speaker the semantic entitlement to apply ‘drake’ to a male duck, and licensing her to draw certain inferences (from ‘This creature is a male duck’ to ‘This creature is a drake’ and vice versa). Someone who applies ‘drake’ to a goat violates this rule, but she may still be said to be speaking English even though the mistake itself does not count as English (Glock 2010, 99).

There is much that is problematic here. What (C) lays down is not conditions under which applying ‘green’ is *meaningful*, but merely semantic correctness conditions in the sense above (such as truth conditions). Of course, (C) does have something to do with meaningfulness, insofar as it says that if an expression has a certain meaning then it also has certain correctness conditions. That is, without correctness conditions no meaning. But that is very different from saying that the conditions themselves concern the meaningfulness of an

application. Because Glock fails to see this, he ends up having to say, awkwardly, that whenever someone makes an empirical error (mistaking a goose for a duck) the mistake does not count as English.

Moreover, by suggesting that correctness conditions entail permissions to apply the term to certain objects and draw certain inferences, Glock simply ignores the anti-normativist argument that no normative consequences (whether in terms of oughts or permissions) follow from statements of correctness conditions, such as (C).²⁶ It does not follow from (C) that *S* is permitted to apply ‘green’ in certain ways or to draw certain inferences – it merely follows that if *S* applies the term to non-green objects the application is mistaken (and, similarly, that certain inferences drawn by *S* will be truth-preserving, others not). In the end, Glock’s argument reduces to the claim that “it is difficult to deny that ‘correct’ and ‘incorrect’ are normative terms, terms of appraisal” (Glock 2010, 97). However, as we have noted elsewhere, standard dictionary definitions of ‘correct’ list both normative and non-normative uses (Glüer & Wikforss 2015, 72) More importantly, as stressed above, the decisive question is not whether ordinary usage construes ‘correct’ as a normative notion, but whether the relevant notion of semantic correctness need be construed normatively for the purposes of semantics – and this, we have argued, is not the case.

Now, if one takes this on board and denies that the need for semantic correctness conditions itself shows meaning to be normative, then the appeal to the community practice comes in a different light. One can then grant that there is a certain type of normativity that only arises within the context of the community (such as the normativity of conventions) but deny that this shows anything about the need for a communal practice in order to secure semantic correctness conditions. If the direct argument from correctness

²⁶ Notice, also, that in the formulation of (C) there is no conflation of the sort suggested by Glock with the empirical proposition “In English it is correct to apply ‘green’ only to green objects”. What is stated is merely that there is an implication from an expression being meaningful to its having certain correctness conditions – this is *not* an empirical statement about what a word means in a particular language.

conditions to normativity fails, so does the direct argument from correctness conditions to the need for the community. For instance, Williams's claim that "the very idea of normativity...cannot get a foothold unless the practice is a social one" (Williams 1999, 175) may well be right but it does not follow that there can be no semantic correctness conditions without the social practice.

Let us return to Wittgenstein. That the direct argument from semantic correctness to the community fails, naturally, does not show that Wittgenstein did not subscribe to this argument: Even great philosophers subscribe to mistaken doctrines. The important question, then, is whether there is some *textual* evidence suggesting that Wittgenstein in fact held that an appeal to the community practice was essential to account for semantic correctness conditions, i.e., for meaning.

3.2. Wittgenstein on agreement

Williams's main evidence derives from Wittgenstein's claim that there is a way of following a rule which is not an interpretation and his appeal to the role of agreement. She makes her point by drawing a contrast between Wittgenstein and Davidson. Since Davidson construes meaning in terms of interpretation, she argues, his view entails that there is interpretation 'all the way down'. He therefore fails to recognize that interpretation must be the exception and is only possible against the background of a shared language. Although Davidson does appeal to the importance of a agreement in beliefs, Williams argues, he does not see that what is needed is a much more pervasive agreement: There need be shared techniques and practices of language. Davidson's claim that speaker and interpreter need not share any linguistic norms or conventions therefore undercuts the possibility of interpretation and communication: "Shared beliefs require shared practices and techniques, practices and techniques that Wittgenstein identifies as crucial to the language game and so part of language" (Williams

2000, 308). This, according to Williams, is the significance of Wittgenstein's famous appeal to agreement. It is only because our reactions to a given training and to certain stimulus are in agreement, that 'going on as before' is possible and thereby the distinction between correct and incorrect applications. At the foundation of language and communication lies not interpretation (that would lead to a regress) but shared bedrock judgments of sameness.

It is clear that Williams misconstrues the role of interpretation in Davidson's account. His claim is not that meaning is determined by the speaker's applying a certain interpretation to her words – or by the interpreter doing so.²⁷ On the contrary, as we have seen above, Davidson holds that a plausible theory of meaning determination must proceed without assuming mental content. This is why he takes meaning to be determined by speaker use, her pattern of assent and dissent in a context, and the device of the radical interpreter is meant to illustrate precisely how use determines meaning. The regress argument does therefore not apply to Davidson's metasemantics. Nor would Davidson object to the idea that Williams ascribes to Wittgenstein, that meaning is *constituted* by use. It is of course correct that Davidson construes particular applications of terms as *evidence* for the semantic theory, but the sharp contrast drawn between constitution and evidence is problematic in the context of Davidson precisely because he takes meaning to be evidence constituted.²⁸ Although any particular use may be mistaken, the overall use of the speaker determines the meaning of her words. This means that the function from use to meaning is many-one, and that not every difference in use is a difference in meaning. However this is perfectly compatible with the thesis that meaning is constituted by use – indeed, anyone defending such a thesis, including

²⁷ Nor is his claim that learning a first language involves the child applying an interpretation on the expressions taught. See Verheggen 2006 who notes that in the case of a child learning a first language Davidson can call her judgments 'blind' just as much as the communitarian can (Verheggen 2006, 215). Davidson also stresses that he is not "concerned with the infinitely difficult problem of how a first language is learned" (Davidson, 1986, 100).

²⁸ As Kathrin Glüer argues in her contribution to this volume, in Davidson's philosophy evidence has an "epistemico-metaphysical double significance" (p....).

Wittgenstein, would have to give a many-one construal of the function from use to meaning for the claim to be at all plausible.²⁹

The question is whether Williams gets Wittgenstein right. As suggested above, there is no reason to think that the conclusion of Wittgenstein's regress argument is that shared conventions are essential to meaning. On the contrary, the argument shows how problematic the idea is that meaning is determined by speakers' following certain rules. But what role does agreement play then? Does it support the claim that Wittgenstein takes the shared linguistic practice to be essential to meaning?

This issue has been much debated in Wittgenstein scholarship. Scholars have typically proceeded along the lines suggested by Williams, by providing an independent argument in support of the idea that meaning requires a social practice, then suggesting that Wittgenstein must have subscribed to this argument. Looking at the texts, however, there is little evidence in support of this reading of Wittgenstein. Instead, I believe, Wittgenstein stresses the role of agreement for very different reasons: Not because he takes meaning to be determined by the community practice, but because he is investigating the very preconditions of having such a practice. In this, interestingly, his appeal to agreement is quite close to that of Davidson.³⁰

As suggested above, Davidson appeals to the principle of charity in order to solve the problem of disentangling meaning and belief. This problem, again, concerns precisely how use determines meaning. Davidson's proposal is that by assuming by and large agreement in belief (and by and large rationality) the interpreter can use the speaker's pattern of assent and dissent to reach an interpretation of the speaker's words, spelling out the

²⁹ Criticizing Davidson's idea that two individuals rarely speak the same language, Glock suggests that Davidson makes the mistake of assuming that "every divergence in linguistic use amounts to a difference in idiolects" (Glock 2010, 102). Williams makes a similar accusation, suggesting that "any difference in belief or use of an expression marks a different language" (Williams 2000, 305). This, however, is precisely to misunderstand the role of the principle of charity and to miss that Davidson takes the function from use to meaning to be many-one.

³⁰ This is stressed in Glüer 2000.

semantic correctness conditions of her expressions. The problem of meaning and belief, it should be clear, is closely connected to the problem of rule-following that occupies Wittgenstein in paragraphs 143-242 of the *Investigations*: How can the individual's application of a sign determine that she uses it in accordance with meaning M_1 ('following rule R_1 ') rather than in accordance with meaning M_2 ('following rule R_2 ')? How can it be that *use* (which is limited) determines correctness conditions (which extend beyond the actual use)? Unlike Davidson, of course, Wittgenstein frames these points in terms of rules and rule-following. The reason for this, Kathrin Glüer and I have suggested, is that Wittgenstein held that there is a certain *analogy* between rules and meaning: The meaning of a term determines its correct application just as a rule determines a set of actions being in accordance with it, and both meanings and rules are 'grasped' by speakers and rule-followers.³¹ However, that Wittgenstein takes there to be such an analogy should not mislead anyone into thinking that he takes guidance by rules to be essential to meaning, and it should not obscure the close connection between Wittgenstein's problem of rule-following and Davidson's problem of meaning and belief.³²

It is in the light of this, I believe, that we should see Wittgenstein's appeal to agreement, such as his claim in paragraph 242, that if language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also in judgments, i.e. in beliefs. Like Davidson, Wittgenstein suggests that communication, agreement in meaning,

³¹ Glüer & Wikforss 2010. As we note, the analogy between meaning and rules is quite explicit in *On Certainty*. The meaning of a word, Wittgenstein writes, is a kind of employment of it and that is "why there is an analogy between the concepts 'meaning' and 'rule'" (Wittgenstein 1969, § 62).

³² In his later writings, when discussing Kripke's Wittgenstein Davidson also tends to frame his discussion in terms of rule-following (see for instance Davidson 1990 and 1992). This is not because he has suddenly accepted that speaking a language involves guidance by rules (cf. Davidson 1992, 113) but because he too sees that there is an analogy between the problem of meaning and the problem of rule-following. In these texts Davidson also discusses the notion of 'going on as before', much like Wittgenstein, and argues that it requires interaction with a second person – an argument that goes beyond his early account of interpretation. According to some, a similar argument can be found in Wittgenstein's rule-following discussion and in his remarks on the possibility of a private language (see Verheggen 2006 and 2007). I will not discuss Davidson's second person argument, or Wittgenstein's private language argument, since my main concern is with the idea that meaning is social in the sense that conventions determine meaning.

requires agreement in belief. It is not enough, for instance, that we both agree on an ostensive definition such as ‘this is green’; the possibility of communication (the public nature of meaning) also requires that we agree on the truth value of a number of sentences involving ‘green’, that there is an agreement in empirical judgments. In *Remarks of the Foundations of Mathematics*, we find the precursor of paragraph 242, where this idea is quite explicit. The phenomenon of language, Wittgenstein writes, is based on regularity, on agreement in action, and it is of the greatest importance that the enormous majority of us agree on certain things:

We say that in order to communicate, people must agree with one another about the meanings of words. But the criterion for this agreement is not just agreement with reference to definitions, e.g. ostensive definitions ... but also an agreement in judgments. It is essential for communication that we agree in a large number of judgments (Wittgenstein 1956 VI, 39).³³

This suggests that Wittgenstein relies on a principle of meaning determination that is very similar to Davidson’s principle of charity, mapping facts about use on to semantic correctness conditions in such a way that the speaker comes out as (by and large) sharing our beliefs and our way of reasoning. For instance, we can determine whether someone uses ‘green’ with the same meaning as we do on the assumption that she (by and large) agrees with us in her judgments. If she consistently applies ‘green’ to non-green objects it can be concluded (*ceteris paribus*) that she means something different by ‘green’.³⁴ This agreement is an agreement “on which the working of our language is based” (Wittgenstein 1953, § 240), a precondition of the very possibility of a shared language. Naturally, in the case of language instruction (which Wittgenstein often considers) the agreement in belief will lead to an

³³ At points Wittgenstein’s formulations are very similar to those of Davidson, in particular in *On Certainty*. For example: “The *truth* of my statements is the test of my *understanding* of these statements. That is to say: if I make certain false statements, it becomes uncertain whether I understand them” (Wittgenstein 1969, § 80-81).

³⁴ Cf. *Investigations* §143 where Wittgenstein discusses the difference between a subject making mistakes and making ‘systematic mistakes’: In this case, Wittgenstein says, “we shall be tempted to say that he has understood wrong”, i.e. that he follows a different rule (means something different).

agreement in language (if the instruction is successful), but the two types of agreement must not be conflated. On the contrary, it is against the background of agreement in belief that it can be determined *whether* there is agreement in language.

One difference between Wittgenstein and Davidson is that whereas Davidson investigates the preconditions of communication by focusing on what goes on in successful communication, Wittgenstein tends to consider cases where communication *breaks down* – as when someone responds randomly or suddenly goes on in an unexpected way (such as the ‘bent’ rule-follower who is taught the series +2 but starts adding 4 beyond 1000):

Following a rule is analogous to obeying an order. We are trained to do so; we react to an order in a particular way. But what if one person reacts in one way and another in another to the order of training? Which one is right? (Wittgenstein 1953, § 206)

By considering cases such as these, Wittgenstein brings out how language and the possibility of communication rest on contingent facts about us as human beings. This leads him to emphasize a further, more primitive type of agreement: an agreement in how we react to a given training. For instance, when given an ostensive definition we agree in what it is to go on in the same way, in what things count as being the same as the one ostended. Paragraph 206 is accordingly followed by a discussion of the notion of sameness, stressing the extent to which it rests on our shared primitive reactions, culminating in his famous remarks in paragraph 219: “*This is how it strikes me.* When I obey a rule, I do not choose. I obey the rule blindly.” Wittgenstein’s point is not that meaning is determined by rule-guidance and that there is a way of being guided by a rule ‘blindly’, but that language depends on there being a primitive agreement in how we project from a finite number of cases, in things *striking* us in a certain way.

Williams is therefore right to suggest that Wittgenstein stresses a further type of agreement, one that is simply taken for granted by Davidson.³⁵ Wittgenstein sometimes describes this deeper lying type of agreement not as an agreement in belief ('opinion') but as an agreement in 'forms of life', presumably in order to stress that it is a more primitive type of agreement, functioning as a presupposition of agreement in concepts and belief (Wittgenstein 1953, § 241). However, again, that there need be this further type of agreement does not show that there need be agreement in *language*, shared conventions – on the contrary, the agreement he talks about is a *precondition* of having a shared language in the first place. And if this precondition fails, if we cannot “find a great deal of reason and truth” in the subject (Davidson 1974a, 153), then the conclusion is not that we have encountered a language that we do not understand, but that the subject is not a language user. Here, Wittgenstein and Davidson give the same answer: There is not enough detectable regularity for us to call it a language (Wittgenstein 1953, § 27). This is part and parcel of the idea, central to both of them, that meaning is essentially *public* – accessible from our point of view.

4. Concluding remarks

I have argued that there are important similarities between Davidson's and Wittgenstein's approaches to metasemantics: Both take meaning to be determined by use rather than rule-guidance, both take meaning to be essentially tied to communication, and both investigate the conditions under which communication is possible arguing that communication requires agreement in judgments. Strawson is wrong to suggest that Wittgenstein and Davidson are on the opposite sides of his Homeric struggle. He is wrong about this, in part, because he

³⁵ However, as noted by Glüer (this volume, p...), it is plausible that Davidson simply built this type of agreement into the principle of charity, since he speaks of the principle as involving the speaker to be responding to the same features of the world that the interpreter would respond to (Davidson 1991). This is to be expected since there is an intimate connection between this type of agreement and agreement in belief: we could not agree on a range of objects that they are green unless we responded to the same features of the world (in this case the color of the object) in the same way.

assumes that in order for meaning to be public meaning need be determined by the shared conventions. But he is also wrong when he claims, like Glock and Williams, that Wittgenstein takes meaning to be essentially tied to conventions.³⁶

Instead of Strawson's struggle, however, another one can be detected, one that does seem to divide the field of philosophy of language into two opposing camps: the struggle between making meanings perfectly public and making them perfectly objective. As Kathrin Glüer argues in her contribution to this volume, Davidson and Wittgenstein both present metasemantic accounts that are epistemic in nature, relating to how speakers such as ourselves could come to know the meaning of another's expressions. The appeal to agreement brings this out since the upshot is that the properties picked out by our terms will be sensitive to our way of responding to stimuli and categorizing objects. This means, Glüer argues, that meanings won't be perfectly objective, and she suggests we have a dilemma here: the dilemma of objectivity and sensitivity (p..).

Here, I think, we have a struggle that quite plausibly could be described in Homeric terms: the struggle between theories that take meanings to be perfectly objective (a contemporary representative would be Kripke) and theories that take meanings to be essentially public and tied to communication.³⁷ Indeed, this is precisely one of the central fault lines between the early and the later Wittgenstein. On Strawson's way of setting things up, the difference between early and late Wittgenstein is that the early Wittgenstein belongs to formal semantics theories whereas the later Wittgenstein belongs to communication-intention

³⁶ It should be noted that Strawson's text is an inaugural lecture from 1969, and for that reason he is only discussing Davidson's early paper 'Truth and Meaning' from 1967. In this paper the basic ideas concerning meaning and radical interpretation are laid down, but the development of these ideas, in particular Davidson's view on conventions and communication, comes only in the later papers discussed above. This may explain why Strawson takes Davidson to belong firmly to the formal semantics camp. Nevertheless, leaving Davidson aside, Strawson simply assumes that the project of formal semantics is incompatible with the idea that meaning is essentially tied to communication.

³⁷ I have in mind, here, the Kripke of *Naming and Necessity* 1980, and his account of natural kind terms. However, it should be clear that what drives the skeptical argument in Kripke's 1982 book on Wittgenstein is precisely the idea that meanings should be perfectly objective, available *sub specie aeternis* as it were (see Glüer this volume, p...).

theories. This is implausible not only because the later Wittgenstein is not a communication-intention theorist but also because it does not seem quite right to describe the *Tractatus* as a text in formal semantics. More illuminating is to see the change from early to late Wittgenstein in terms of a move from an objective construal of meanings to an epistemic construal. In the *Tractatus* meaning is understood thoroughly non-epistemically: not in terms of the discriminatory capacities and sensitivities of speakers but in terms of objectively given properties in the world. Once the sign is projected on to the object its role in language is fully determined. As argued above, it was Wittgenstein's skepticism about this idea that first led him to appeal to the role of conventions in meaning determination. Eventually, it was his skepticism about the appeal to conventions that led him to argue that language presupposes agreement in judgments and in techniques – landing him on the same side of this particular struggle as that of Davidson.

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