FOREWORD

This foreword is in three parts. In the first part I expound, and criticise from a Wittgensteinian standpoint, the thesis of Hobbes and Locke that communicating consists in conveying ideas or thoughts from one mind to another. In the second part I comment on those lectures in which things are said which relate to this thesis. In the third part I give a brief indication of the themes of the remaining lectures in the volume.

I

Dr Timothy Potts, Lecturer in Philosophy at the University of Leeds, says in his lecture that it would be a mistake to think of linguistic communication as a branch of transport studies.

Communication would be a branch of transport studies if it consisted in conveying things called 'ideas' or 'thoughts' from one person's mind to another person's mind, by the medium of things which are heard or seen (spoken or written sentences). The notion Potts holds to be mistaken is the notion that the audible or visible things make communication possible by expressing and evoking the mental things, ideas or thoughts. Only the mental things are intrinsically meaningful, on this allegedly mistaken view. A speaker somehow translates his ideas or thoughts into spoken or written signs (he 'encodes' them) and the hearer translates them back again (he 'decodes' them), so that he has the same thoughts as the speaker. Language is needed because we have not got powers of extrasensory perception to enable us to perceive the (inaudible and invisible) thoughts of others; the thoughts have to be converted into a sensible form, spoken or written sentences, before we can be aware of them. And our being aware of another person's thoughts involves our converting the audible or visible sentences back into thoughts of our own – a process of 'interpreting' them.

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Potts says that this is a mistaken view of communication. But he does not say who holds this view, or why they hold it, or why it is a mistake to hold it. To provide a point of reference for my editorial remarks about *some* of the lectures in this volume I shall do what Potts has not done, and enlarge on his remark.

The notion that linguistic communication is a matter of conveying something, ideas or thoughts, from one person's mind to another person's mind is a familiar notion. Or perhaps it would be better to say that, as most people think of communication, it *goes without saying* that it is a matter of conveying ideas or thoughts. For when what goes without saying is actually said – especially the bit about translating thoughts into spoken or written signs and then back again – it begins to lose its obviousness. In fact it begins to look very like a piece of *a priori* theorising about how language works. We say it because we think it *must* be like that, not because we have found, empirically, that it *is* like that.[1] It must be like that, we think, because what is said, or written is not intrinsically meaningful – it is really just sounds in the air or marks on paper – so the 'meaningfulness' must be located elsewhere; and where better to locate it, we think, than in the mind.[2]

Of course, there is the reply that the talk about utterances 'expressing and evoking ideas' is not meant to be taken seriously. It is not intended as an *explanation* of communication, as a Popperian-falsifiable *theory* of communication. It is just a way of talking.

But when a philosopher like John Locke talks of a man not speaking intelligibly unless his words 'excite the same ideas in the hearer which he makes them stand for in speaking' (Locke, 1690, III, ii, 8) then this is not just a way of talking. It is a theory. And for Locke, at any rate, it is a theory with considerable ramifications. For instance, a Lockean 'idea' is not just what a word stands for if it is meaningful. It is also what is impressed on the passive mind in perception. So if I have associated the right word – say, the word 'blue' – with the right impression – the impression I get when I look at a cornflower – there is no fear of my language being unconnected with reality, as it might be if I talked about 'fate' or 'fortune', these not being words for simple ideas impressed on my mind by external objects (Locke, 1690, II, xxx, 1–2. Cf. Vesey, 1976).

The next move is to say that although Locke, and various other people who lived a long time ago, were in the business of trying to explain communication in terms of ideas and thoughts – and language as a means of transporting them from one mind to an-

other – now we know better. We no longer resort to bogus mentalistic explanations. The behaviourists, from J. B. Watson to B. F. Skinner, have shown us the light. They have helped us to cut the umbilical cord which fed Cartesian notions about mental things, states and processes into our theorising about communication. Linguistics, like psychology, has grown up, and flown the nest of philosophy, to become a science in its own right.

Unfortunately, calling something a science does not guarantee that its practitioners forthwith cease to be attracted to those same specious accounts of what it is to communicate – and to perceive, to understand, to remember, to recognise, and so on – to which the rest of us are attracted when we try to say *what* we are doing when we do these things. Jerrold Katz (1966, pp. 98, 103) writes:

> Roughly, linguistic communication consists in the production of some external, publicly observable, acoustic phenomenon whose phonetic and syntactic structure encodes a speaker's inner, private thoughts or ideas and the decoding of the phonetic and syntactic structure exhibited in such a physical phenomenon by other speakers, in the form of an inner private experience of the same thoughts or ideas.
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> Roughly, and somewhat metaphorically, we can say that something of the following sort goes on when successful communication takes place. The speaker . . . chooses some message he wants to convey to his listeners: some thought he wants them to receive . . . This message is encoded in the form of a phonetic representation . . . This encoding then becomes a signal to the speaker's articulatory organs, and he vocalizes an utterance of the proper phonetic shape. This is, in turn, picked up by the hearer's auditory organs. The speech sounds that stimulate these organs are then converted into a neural signal from which a phonetic representation equivalent to the one into which the speaker encoded his message is obtained. This representation is decoded into a representation of the same message that the speaker originally chose to convey.

Katz says 'roughly, and somewhat metaphorically', but he does not say what it is that is metaphorical in his account. It is this. He writes as if a person has a private language in which he thinks, and has to translate this into a public language in order to communicate. He writes, that is, as if a child's speaking and understanding the first language it learns from its parents is like the speaking and understanding of a foreign language by someone who

is already competent in another language. To put it slightly differ-
ently, he writes as if a child learning its first language 'already
possessed a language in which it thought and that the teacher's
job is to induce it to guess his meaning in the realm of meanings
before the child's mind' (Wittgenstein, 1958, p. 105).

Against this I would say: we are not foreigners in our own
language; we are at home in it. We do not have to encode what
we want to say from something else before we can say it, or decode
it before we can understand it. The notion that we have to is a
myth – the myth that to talk of the meaning of an utterance is to
talk of something existing alongside the utterance, but in the
queer medium of the mind; the myth of the sense behind the
sentence.

It is not good enough, of course, simply to be abusive, and call
something a 'myth'. One has to try to deal with it. But how?
Philosophical myths are not like scientific theories; they are not
amenable to experimental testing, or anything like that. It is more
a matter of getting rid of them, than of proving them wrong.
'Success in these matters is more like causing a loss of religious
faith than like a triumph of fair argument' (Hunter, 1973, p. 22).

One way of dealing with a philosophical myth is to expose its
implications. It is not difficult to see what are the implications of
the myth of the sense behind the sentence. How can a speaker and
a hearer ever know that the ideas and thoughts that are *evoked* by
an utterance are the same as the ideas and thoughts *expressed* by it,
and hence know that what one person means is the same as what
another person means? The two people are never in a position to
compare their thoughts. The thoughts are locked away in their
individual minds.[3]

The trouble with this way of dealing with the myth is that it
may backfire. '*Very true*', it may be said, 'how *can* we ever know
that another person means by "The bus is late" or "It's going to
rain" what we mean?' And that is not at all the result we intended,
for we intended our remark about implications to be a *reductio ad
absurdum*. Our listener has simply embraced the absurdity, and
gone away a convinced sceptic.

There is another way of dealing with a philosophical myth. And
that is to try and show that the needs that are satisfied by the
myth can be satisfied in ways which do not involve a myth. In
this connection let us consider, first, the stress on the 'inner' and
the 'private' in what Katz says:

... linguistic communication consists in the production of some external, publicly observable, acoustic phenomenon whose . . . structure encodes a speaker's *inner, private* thoughts or ideas and the decoding of the . . . structure . . . by other speakers in the form of an *inner private* experience of the same thoughts or ideas [my italics].

I want to suggest that this talk about the 'inner' and the 'private' is not what is needed. What is needed is something rather different, something Professor Norman Malcolm calls 'the autonomy of self-testimony' (Malcolm, 1964, p. 153).

Consider the circumstances in which we say, of a small child, that he has mastered the correct use of some term, such as 'like'. Or perhaps '*dis*like' would be a better example. If he says 'I dislike Auntie Kate', but seeks her company, holds her by the hand when they go for a walk, and so on, we would conclude that he has not understood the word 'dislike'. Perhaps he thinks it is a strong form of 'like'. But when on several occasions there is the *right* correlation of the child's behaviour with the child's use of the term, we conclude that he has mastered its correct use. By having behavioural criteria for the truth of a third-person statement, such as 'He likes so-and-so', we are able to determine whether someone has a correct understanding of the term in question.

Let us suppose, now, that the child *has* mastered the correct use of 'like' and 'dislike'. He says 'I like Auntie Kate'. For him to be able to say this he does not have to have observed his own behaviour. His behaviour must match what he says for *us* to say he has mastered the correct use of the terms he uses, but he does not have to observe his behaviour to be able to say 'I like Auntie Kate'. (Wittgenstein, 1953, I, Section 357.) In other words, in respect of his behaviour, his self-testimony is autonomous. Moreover, once we are satisfied that he has grasped the correct use of the term, we accept what he says even if what he says is *contradicted* by his behaviour. For example, he tells us how much he *dis*likes Auntie Kate but, being a well-brought-up little boy, he behaves towards her in a manner of which nobody could complain.

But there is more to 'the autonomy of self-testimony' than this. For there is a temptation to say that although the small boy does not have to observe his *behaviour* to be able to say 'I like Auntie Kate' there is something else he does have to observe, something *inside* himself, a feeling he has somehow identified as a liking-Auntie-Kate feeling. That is, there is a temptation to say that

when he says 'I like Auntie Kate' he is reporting his observation, by introspection, of a private object, an Auntie-Kate-directed feeling of liking.[4] Perhaps the source of this temptation lies in our reverence for knowledge. The small boy says 'I like Auntie Kate' or 'I hope she'll come again' or 'I expect she'll give me a birthday present' – and for some reason we think we should not accept this as a valid communication unless we allow for an answer to the question 'How does he know?' We invent the private object – the feeling of liking, the hope, the expectation – to provide an answer to a question of the form 'How does he know?' when what we should be doing is recognising that not all linguistic communications are of the same form – claims to know something. Not only do we not need the notions of the 'inner' and the 'private' in order to accept the autonomy of self-testimony, invoking them actually distorts our understanding of self-testimony. It makes us objects even to ourselves. I would sooner say that saying 'I like Auntie Kate' is *itself* a bit of liking-Auntie-Kate behaviour (Wittgenstein, 1953, II, i; 1967, Section 545).

In order to undermine the myth of the sense behind the sentence we need to add, to the autonomy of self-testimony, something about how questions about the meaning of words can best be answered. Wittgenstein begins *The Blue Book* as follows:

What is the meaning of a word?

Let us attack this question by asking, first, what is an explanation of the meaning of a word; what does the explanation of a word look like?

The way this question helps us is analogous to the way the question 'how do we measure a length?' helps us to understand the problem 'what is length?' (1958, p. 1).

I am reminded by this of P. W. Bridgman's classical operationalist definition of the concept of length:

To find the length of an object, we have to perform certain physical operations. The concept of length is therefore fixed when the operations by which length is measured are fixed; that is, the concept of length involves as much and nothing more than the set of operations by which length is determined. In general we mean by any concept nothing more than a set of operations; the concept is synonymous with the corresponding set of operations. (1927.)

Wittgenstein's advice is this. Just as it helps to ask, not 'What is

length?' but 'How do we measure a length?' so it helps to ask, not 'What is meaning?' but 'What is an explanation of the meaning of a word?' Let us follow his advice. Let us take the word 'pain', and see where we get by asking not for the meaning, but for an *explanation* of the meaning, of the word. If we had asked for the meaning of the word 'pain' we would probably have been told that it is a word for an unpleasant bodily sensation. What would we be told if we asked for an *explanation* of the meaning of the word? I do not think it is at all obvious, but Wittgenstein evidently thought we could expect to be told something about how a child learns the word, and how it is used. As a child learns to speak, it learns to replace the natural expression of pain with a verbal expression. 'I've got a pain' replaces moaning. And its use is similar: to draw attention to the need of the person in pain for relief. The moan does this accidentally, so to speak. The verbal utterance does it deliberately (Vesey, 1974a, pp. 153–6).

What are the benefits of having such an *explanation* of the meaning of the word 'pain'? Consider the question 'How do I know that the expression "I've got a pain" which replaces moaning in me, is used to replace moaning in others?' Answer: By seeing whether they say 'I've got a pain' in appropriate circumstances. But now consider the question 'How do I know that others mean by the word "pain" the same as what I mean, namely this unpleasant bodily sensation?' This positively invites the answer: 'I can't; one person can never get into another person's mind'.

There is a saying attributed to Wittgenstein: 'Don't ask for the meaning, ask for the use'. I think this has at least a negative value. Whatever else a 'use' may be, it is not a thing. And so the saying directs us away from the notion that words have sense by standing for, or referring to, things – either public things, like chairs and tables, or private ones, like ideas and bodily sensations. It directs us away from the notion that a word's having sense is a matter of its being somehow correlated with a thing.

The concept of 'use' is one we can employ in another way. We can distinguish between *using* an expression and *attending to* the expression. Do you see what I mean? There; I have just used an expression, 'Do you see what I mean?', and now you are attending to it, and wondering what I am going to say about it – perhaps something about my not intending the word 'see' in it to be taken to refer to visual perception. So we have this distinction between using and attending to – not unlike that between using spectacles to see with, and taking them off and looking at them. This is con-

nected with what I said about 'the myth of the sense behind the sentence' and about our not being foreigners in our own language. The connection is this. In so far as I am *using* an expression, as distinct from *attending* to it, I am at home in it. That is, there is not a 'what-I-think' distinct from, behind, the 'what-I-say', and which I have had to translate into what I say. For example, suppose my wife sees me putting on my coat to go out, and asks me to buy a paper. I say I am going to the bank. (The bank is in the opposite direction to the newspaper shop.) Do I *think* I am going to the bank *as I say* I am going to it? I would say: If you want to talk of my thinking it in such circumstances, then the least misleading thing to say is that I think it *in* saying it. That is, the thinking is *in* the saying; it is not *behind* it. Suppose, however, that as I say it it strikes me that the word 'bank' is ambiguous. (We happen to live near a river bank.) *Then* I attend to the words I have uttered, and in so doing, I put myself, as a thinker, *outside* what I have said, and perhaps prepare to say something else, which will provide an interpretation, or translation, of what I have said (Wittgenstein, 1967, Sections 233–5, 287). But the point I want to make is this. The fact that one *can* always see what one has said as a string of words, which might be interpreted in this way or that, does not entail that one never *does* say things without any such distinction between what one says and what one means. When one uses some expression, such as 'I'm going to the bank', unreflectively, then there are not two things, one's thinking and one's saying. And anyone who says that there *must* be, and that there must be a process of encoding the thought into a form of words, says so *in spite of*, and not because of, his experience of what it is to say things.

The investigations of the psychologist, Jean Piaget, into the child's conception of thinking, are interesting in this connection. Piaget would ask the children a question about thinking, and note down the answer he got from six-year-olds, from eight-year-olds and from children of eleven or twelve. He regarded their answers as evidence of an increasing sophistication in the conception of thinking as the children got older. The question he put to the children was 'What is it you think with?' If a child did not know what to make of this question Piaget would prompt him: 'When you walk, you walk with the feet; well then, when you think, what do you think with?'

About the eight-year-olds, at the second stage of sophistication, Piaget writes:

The second stage is marked by adult influences. The child has learnt that we think with the head, sometimes it even alludes to the 'brain' (Piaget, 1929, p. 38).

At the third, and final, stage of sophistication, at age eleven or twelve, Piaget writes, thought is 'no longer materialised'. In other words the child has progressed to the conception of thinking as something mental, behind any verbal expression. This is, in fact, Piaget's own conception of thinking. In the course of reporting his investigations he makes remarks like 'When the child is questioned he translates his thought into words, but these words are necessarily inadequate' and 'Whatever the answer may be, the meaning behind the words is what matters'.

About the six-year-olds Piaget writes:

During [the first] stage children believe that thinking is 'with the mouth'. Thought is identified with the voice. Nothing takes place in the head or in the body . . . There is nothing subjective in the act of thinking (p. 38).

Later, he comments on this, as follows:

In treating of the development of the notion of thought, we may regard as primitive the child's conviction that it thinks with the mouth. The notion of thinking, as soon as it appears, becomes confused with that of voice, that is to say with words, either spoken or heard (p. 44).

Why does Piaget use the word 'confused' here? I think it is because he accepts what is said at the third stage, by the eleven and twelve-year-olds, as giving the truth of the matter. He unquestioningly believes in what I earlier called 'the myth of the sense behind the sentence'. It is interesting to compare what Piaget's six-year-olds say with what Wittgenstein says in *The Blue Book*. Perhaps Wittgenstein read Piaget. I do not know. This is what Wittgenstein says:

It is misleading to talk of thinking as a mental activity. We may say that thinking is essentially the activity of operating with signs. This activity is performed by the hand, when we think by writing; by the mouth and larynx, when we think by speaking; and if we think by imagining signs or pictures, I can give you no agent that thinks. If then you say that in such cases the mind thinks, I would only draw your attention to the fact that you are using a metaphor, that here the mind is an agent in a different

sense from that in which the hand can be said to be the agent in writing.

If again we talk about the locality where thinking takes place we have a right to say that this locality is the paper on which we write or the mouth which speaks. And if we talk of the head or the brain as the locality of thought, this is using the expression 'locality of thinking' in a different sense. . . .

Perhaps the main reason why we are so strongly inclined to talk of the head as the locality of our thoughts is this . . .

We say, 'The thought is not the same as the sentence; for an English and a French sentence, which are utterly different, can express the same thought'. And now, as the sentences are *somewhere*, we look for a place for the thought . . . We say, 'surely the thought is *something*; it is not nothing'; and all one can answer to this is, that the word 'thought' has its *use*, which is of a totally different kind from the use of the word 'sentence'. (1958, pp. 6–7.)

In this passage Wittgenstein mentions one argument for saying that the thought is not the same as the sentence – two sentences, one in English and one in French may be said to express the same thought; since the thought is the same but the sentences different the thought is not the same as either of the sentences. Another of the traditional arguments is what may be called 'the parrot argument'. It goes like this. We could easily train a parrot to respond to a certain signal with the words 'Going to the bank'. We say to the parrot 'Where's Polly going, then? Where's Polly going, then?' and the parrot responds 'Going to the bank. Going to the bank'. Now, unless we are extraordinarily naive, we do not credit the parrot with meaning what it says. I am not even sure we would say that the parrot had *said* it was going to the bank; that is, had made an assertion. Why not? Well – the argument goes – it must be because we do not think that behind the parrot's utterance is the *thought* 'I'm going to the bank'. Without something mental, to back it up, the utterance is just sounds in the air, a meaningless noise.

I do not wish to deny that most people find the argument convincing. If they did not, the myth of the sense behind the sentence would not be as popular as it is. What I do wish to deny is that the argument is acceptable. There is an assumption in it, and, I contend, the assumption is false. The assumption is about what lies behind our saying of a *man*, when he comes out with the sounds

'I'm going to the bank', that he is *asserting* that he is going to the bank, but our not saying this of a parrot. The assumption is that there is only one possible explanation of our saying this: namely, that we believe that the man's utterance is the result of encoding something that exists at a pre-linguistic level, namely a thought, and that in the case of the parrot there is nothing at this level.

To show that this assumption is false I need, of course, to supply an alternative explanation. The alternative explanation is this. We say that the man, who utters the same sounds as the parrot, is *asserting* that he is going to the bank, because he is a man, and not a parrot. And unless he speaks in a very odd way we take it for granted that he knows what he is saying. In other words, he knows the language, in the sense of being able to use it as the rest of us do. For instance, we assume he would satisfy our behavioural criteria for being someone who knows the meaning of the word 'bank'. We think he is a member of our linguistic community.

Let me try and sum all this up, making use of the notion of a linguistic 'practice'. We are right, I am saying, in distinguishing between sense and sentence. But we are wrong in thinking of the sense as something – *some thing* – behind the sentence. It is the sentence, and nothing else, which has sense, and it has sense in virtue of there being an accepted common practice with sentences like it, and others. It is this accepted common practice which makes communication possible, not the existence of mental items – ideas or thoughts – to be transported from one mind to another. An expression has meaning in virtue of its use conforming to the accepted common practice. It is because the practice is something in which people share that there are – as we saw earlier – behavioural criteria for saying that someone has cottoned on to the use of a word, such as 'dislike'.

The two views of what makes communication possible – the 'mental items' view and the 'accepted common practice' view – differ in a number of respects.

1. Holders of the two views cannot give the same account of what it is for two people to mean the same by some word. We have already noticed this, in the case of the word 'pain'. On the 'accepted common practice' view (ACP, for short), the word 'pain' has meaning in that the utterance of a first-person sentence containing it ('I'm in pain') is a linguistic surrogate for the natural expression of pain, a moan. If it functions in this way for two people then no question remains of whether they 'mean the same' by the word. On the 'mental items' view (MI, for short), the word has

meaning by 'standing for' an experience, and, experiences being 'private', it follows that two people can never really mean the same by the word. Moreover, they cannot even tell whether what one of them means by it is similar to what the other means.

On the MI view it is not just words like 'pain' which are said to have meaning by standing for mental items. The same is said of words we use to describe physical objects, like 'blue' and yellow'. Indeed, it is not uncommon to find no distinction made between words like 'pain', on the one hand, and words like 'blue' and 'yellow', on the other. They are treated, equally, as words (or, typically, 'labels') for experiences. Once this move is made, colour words present themselves as the obvious example in terms of which to set forth the problem of how people can mean the same by what they say. This is because there is not the same possibility in the case of colour words, as there is in the case of the word 'pain', of connecting up the words with non-linguistic behaviour. In the way in which pain and a withdrawal reaction naturally go together, seeing that a cornflower is blue does not naturally go with any particular kind of non-linguistic behaviour. The only behaviour it goes with is the linguistic behaviour of calling the object 'blue'. Hence it will seem to someone who both holds the MI view, and sets store by behaviour, that colour words present the privacy problem in a form in which no other words do. The psychologist, D. E. Broadbent, writes:

> When a man sees blue, his experience is intensely real to him, but the essence of it cannot be communicated. All he can do is to say a word which labels that experience, so that he can tell other people whether or not some fresh situation gives him the same quality of awareness. No man can tell whether another is really feeling the same as he does himself when he looks at a colour (1961, p. 39).

2. A second difference between the MI view and the ACP view is that the holders of the two views cannot give the same account of what it is for a child to learn the meaning of a word. On the MI view it is simply a matter of learning to associate the word with one or another of a range of 'ideas'. That there are these ideas, waiting in the mind to be associated with words, must of course be explained independently of the individual's linguistic competence. The empiricist holds that they are acquired from experience by a process which involves seeing the resemblance of different ideas, or seeing what different ideas have in common. Hence what makes

communication possible, on the MI view, is ultimately a kind of *seeing*. On the ACP view, on the other hand, it is a kind of *acting* which makes communication possible.[5] A common practice involves general agreement in judgments.[6] It makes no sense to talk of first seeing that there is agreement in judgments, and then realising that communication is possible.[7] Rather, in finding that communication is sometimes possible, one realises that there must be agreement in judgments, an agreement which reflects a shared form of life.[8]

3. The difference between it being a kind of seeing (on the MI view) and a kind of acting (on the ACP view) which lies at the bottom of our having a language in which we can communicate is reflected in what may be said about 'rules of language' by holders of the two views. Wittgenstein connects talk of 'agreement' with talk of 'rules':

> The word 'agreement' and the word 'rule' are *related* to one another, they are cousins. If I teach anyone the use of the one word, he learns the use of the other with it (1953, Part I, Section 224).

But he does not mean that agreement in judgments is to be explained by people realising what the relevant rules are. He writes:

> You must remember that there may be such a language-game as 'continuing a series of digits' in which no rule, no expression of a rule is ever given, but learning happens *only* through examples. So that the idea that every step should be justified by a something – a sort of pattern – in our mind, would be quite alien to these people (1967, Section 295).

And:

> For just when one says 'But don't you *see* . . . ?' the rule is no use, it is what is explained, not what does the explaining.
>
> 'He grasps the rule intuitively.' – But why the rule? Why not how he is to continue? (1967, Sections 302–3).

A holder of the MI view may say that a person uses the word 'blue' of such-and-such a range of shades of colour because he can *see* what they have in common. But Wittgenstein says:

> To say that we use the word 'blue' to mean 'what all these shades of colour have in common' by itself says nothing more than that we use the word 'blue' in all these cases (1958, p. 135).

Perhaps the difference between what the holders of the two views mean by 'rules of language' can best be summed up by

making use of the distinction between something 'involving a rule' and something being 'in accordance with a rule' (Wittgenstein, 1958, p. 13). The holder of the MI view thinks that people have to *know* the same rules of language in order to be able to communicate, whereas the holder of the ACP view thinks that people have to *speak in accordance with* the same rules of language in order to be able to communicate. (The holder of the MI view protects himself from the obvious objection, that people cannot say what the rules are, by saying that the knowledge in question is implicit.) The holder of the MI view will talk of 'rules of language' in advancing a psychological theory of how people can communicate; on the ACP view one talks of 'rules of language' as part of a theory of linguistics.[9]

II

The above, fairly general, remarks about communication – to the effect that there are two opposing accounts of what makes communication possible, one involving the notion of mental items, ideas or thoughts, the other involving the notion of an accepted common practice – provide a point of reference for my comments on some of the contributions to this volume.

A holder of the mental items view will think of understanding as involving a process of translating what is heard or seen into ideas or thoughts. The psychological mechanism will be that of association. G. H. R. Parkinson, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Reading, expounds Locke's version of 'the translation theory of understanding'. According to Locke a person does not need language to be able to think, but if he is to communicate he must be able to produce articulate sounds, and 'be able to use these sounds as signs of internal conceptions, and to make them stand as marks for the ideas within his own mind' (Locke, 1690, III.i.2). Parkinson comments:

> It is easy to see why such a theory should be called a 'translation theory'. The speaker as it were translates his ideas into language; the man who hears and understands him translates the language into his own ideas. One may compare the way in which signals are transmitted – the way in which, for example, a sailor is given a message, which he translates into the language of flags; these flags are seen by another sailor, who translates them back into the original message.

Locke did not use the term 'translation', but Professor George Steiner does use it. 'A human being performs an act of translation, in the full sense of the word, when receiving a speech-message from any other human being' (Steiner, 1975, p. 47). Parkinson sees Steiner's main point as being that understanding someone who speaks to us in *our own* language is essentially the same as understanding someone who uses a language which is *not our own*: in each case we translate from one language into another. But if that is so, Parkinson asks, *into what* do we translate something said to us in our own language? Steiner's view, it seems to Parkinson, is in some respects not very different from Locke's. Steiner 'appears to regard that with which a word is associated as the meaning of a word'. There is then the problem that 'no two human beings share an identical associative context' (Steiner, 1975, p. 170), with the implication that no-one ever (fully) understands what another person has said. Parkinson challenges the view that to talk of the meaning of a word is to talk of things people associate with it. 'Steiner is wrong in regarding the meaning of a word as its associations; rather, its meaning is its use in a language, its role in various sayings.' We say of a parrot that it does not understand what it says, not because of the non-occurrence of a certain process, but because of the absence of a certain capacity, the capacity to put the sentence it utters to an appropriate use.

One of the questions Parkinson asks, in the course of criticising the view that to talk of the meaning of a word is to talk of things people associate with it, is: Is it the case that to understand a word is to be *right* about these associations? Dr M. A. Stewart Lecturer in Philosophy at the University of Lancaster says something which might seem to provide an answer to this question. Locke's psychological account of understanding, he says,

... fails to serve any useful theoretical purpose. For the annexation of sounds to perceptions, thoughts, images, etc. *of the right things* must presuppose the linguistic understanding it is supposed to illumine. Furthermore if understanding another's words involves having perceptions or thoughts to match the speaker's, it is difficult to see how the hearer can avoid appropriating the speaker's role at least in certain cases. The only way in which I could understand your expressing a wish to leave the room would be by my wishing to leave the room too. It would be a form of empathy which, so far from enhancing communication, would speedily kill it: everyone would be issuing orders,

warnings, promises, etc., and no-one would be receiving them. Not only does this kind of coincidence of thought not generally occur: but if and where it does that in itself is no evidence of communication, let alone constituting communication; and it is no evidence of understanding, let alone constituting it.

A Lockean might reply, to the first bit of this, that a distinction must be drawn between making the right associations and *knowing* that one has made the right associations. The latter presupposes some account of understanding other than in terms of associations; the former does not. But Locke himself, Stewart says, 'laboured the need to ensure that different people associate the same words with the same ideas as a necessary condition of communication'. Then what was Locke's criterion for one person's ideas being the same as another person's? Professor A. G. N. Flew, in this connection, calls Locke's position 'the paradigm case of explicit commitment to the thesis that language is and must be essentially private'. Stewart thinks Locke can be defended against this charge. I am not convinced that he can (Vesey, 1976).

Stewart thinks that Steiner's version of the translation theory of understanding differs from Locke's in both context and form:

> *The context* is different, because the two thinkers have different conceptions of human nature. Locke took human sociability as an axiom, so readily inferred that the primary role of language is communication. . . . But Steiner's overriding view of language is a view of it as something akin to territorial behaviour. . . .
>
> As for the *form* of the theory, Locke supposed that one person's thoughts of something are transformed into another person's thoughts of the same thing, a thesis whose falsity is at least transparent. In Steiner's case I agree with Parkinson that there is some mystery as to what is being translated into what.

Stewart attended Parkinson's lecture, as did Steiner. From the discussion which followed the lecture I thought that when he came to give his lecture, Stewart would be more sympathetic to Steiner's views than Parkinson had been. It turned out that I was mistaken. Stewart says: 'Despite some short stretches of incisive argument in chapter 3, the main thesis rests largely on iteration and rhetoric; though it is surrounded by a wealth of fascinating erudition, it is not in any detectable way supported by it.' I invited Steiner to give the last lecture in the series, and defend himself against the criticisms that had been advanced, but unfortunately he was unable to accept the invitation, being out of the country. (He is Pro-

fessor of English and Comparative Literature at the University of Geneva.) I hope very much he will find some other opportunity to reply, for the question of what it is for people to understand one another, whether on a personal or on a national level, is an important one, and the conclusion that full understanding never takes place is pessimistic in the extreme.

Gareth B. Matthews, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Massachusetts, criticises Piaget's treatment of children's answers to 'obviously philosophical questions' like 'What is thinking?', 'What is the relation between a word and its meaning?' and 'What are dreams and where are they located?' He complains that Piaget condescendingly evaluates the children's answers in terms of his own preconceptions instead of trying to understand why they say what they say. Matthews is particularly interested in the children's reported answers to the questions 'What is it you think with?' and 'While you are dreaming, where is the dream?' He likens answers to the first of these questions to various philosophical theories. The answer of the six-year-olds – that thinking is 'with the mouth' and that there is nothing subjective in it – corresponds to the theory that thinking is inner speech, as held in one form or another by Plato, Professor P. T. Geach and the behaviourist, J. B. Watson. The answer of the eight-year-olds – that we think with the head, or with the brain – corresponds to various materialistic theories of thinking, including the 'Identity Theory'. The answer of the children of eleven or twelve 'corresponds to classical dualistic theories, especially imagistic accounts to be found in the empiricist tradition'. Perhaps Matthews is right. In the absence of a more extended report of the children's conversation it is hard to tell. The six-year-olds might be budding Wittgensteins instead of budding Watsons. (Is there not something subjective in the *inner* speech theory of thinking?)

Psychologists are particularly prone to talk of communication in terms of 'signals', and of 'encoding' and 'decoding'. Is this just a way of talking, without any theoretical import, or is it to be taken seriously? In this connection consider the remarks by Michael Argyle, Reader in Social Psychology at Oxford University, that 'human communication consists of an intricate combination of verbal and non-verbal signals', and that 'the meaning of a non-verbal signal can be given in terms of how it is encoded or decoded'.

'How' questions are notoriously ambiguous. 'How do you raise one eyebrow, and not the other, in that quizzical way?' can be

answered with 'Like this' and a demonstration, or answered, by the same person, honestly, with 'I don't know how; I picked up the ability years ago'. On the second occasion the question is taken to be a request for an explanation of how to do something, for the benefit of someone who wants to know how to do it. The questioner wants to know how he can do whatever it is which so recognisably expresses quizzicality. *How* can he perform the act which has come to have this meaning?

The situation is complicated still further by there being two sorts of explanations. There is the explanation which is of use to the agent, in terms of what he has to do to bring about the desired effect. And there is the explanation in terms of what happens in the brain, the efferent nerves, and the muscles. A neurologist may discover that one eyebrow rises without the other rising if there is a certain combination of impulses in certain efferent nerves, but this item of information is of no use to the aspiring one-eyebrow-raiser, since impulses in efferent nerves are things which *happen* in him, not things he *does*, or can do. They are events, not possible actions.

When Argyle talks of how a meaning is encoded or decoded is this meant to be taken as a preliminary to an explanation, and, if so, to an agent-useful explanation, or to one of the other kind? I think the answer is that it is not, as a rule, meant to be taken as a preliminary to an agent-useful explanation.

My colleague Judith Greene, Professor of Psychology at the Open University, seems to me to be concerned with two related questions. The first is about the breadth of the concept of communication; the second is the question I touched on at the end of my general remarks, that of the meaning of reference to 'rules of language': are rules of language things the speaker needs to know to be able to communicate or merely things with which what he says must accord for him to communicate?

On the first question, Greene writes:

> There has been a tendency, natural perhaps in such 'verbal' disciplines as philosophy and linguistics, to assume that language and communication are the same thing . . . Are even verbal statements examples of purely linguistic communication? . . . Does it make sense to try and analyse the linguistic structure and content of an utterance without taking into account the use to which it is put in a particular extra-linguistic context?

I referred, earlier, to a saying attributed to Wittgenstein, 'Don't ask for the meaning, ask for the use'. One 'important case where

you can learn that a word has meaning by the particular use we make of it' is, he says, that of the use of 'I am here' (Wittgenstein, 1958, p. 72). Another person learns something from my saying this because he can recognise my voice and because he hears the sound as coming from a certain direction. It would be a bit arbitrary to deny that my saying 'I am here' was an act of communication, but did I *say* the things my hearer learnt? (Vesey, 1974 b, pp. 23–28.) Wittgenstein's point is that whether or not an utterance is meaningful depends on the conditions of its utterance. 'I am here', said to oneself, does not do any work. It is a pseudo-statement.

This is not Judith Greene's example, but I think it serves her purpose, which I take to be to cast doubt on the distinction between meaning and use, or, in her terms, between 'linguistic competence' and 'linguistic performance'. (By 'linguistic competence' I think is meant a speaker's competence to match linguistic structure to 'content', and a hearer's competence to match 'content' to linguistic structure.) Noam Chomsky, she says, 'has argued that a general theory of language is impossible unless linguistic competence is abstracted from the performance by which a speaker goes about making a particular utterance on a particular occasion'. (In other words, a general theory of language is impossible unless there is a 'content' which is *not* to be identified with the meaning-use-function of an expression.) The Wittgensteinian reply to this, I suppose, would be that a general theory of language *is* impossible, because meaning cannot be divorced from use, and have nothing in common with the multifarious uses of language (Wittgenstein, 1953, I, 23, 65, 114, 134–6).

Judith Greene's second question can, I think, be put like this. There is the linguistic form of an utterance, on the one hand, and its meaning (use, function) on the other. Sentences with such-and-such linguistic forms serve such-and-such meanings. But sentences with seemingly very different linguistic forms may serve the same meaning and sentences with very similar linguistic forms may serve different meanings (or some may serve a meaning, others not). In this situation of such a complex correspondence how are we able to communicate as successfully as we do? If the explanation is offered that there are *rules* connecting linguistic forms and meanings, are these rules known to, and used by, speakers and hearers? Or do people merely carry on *as if* they knew the rules? I am fairly sure that this is the question Judith Greene asks. I am not at all sure what her own answer to it is. But she remarks on something she says is 'somewhat annoying to psychologists, namely

the way in which Chomsky, when faced with conflicting evidence from psychological experiments that people do not in fact use the rules of transformational grammar, retreats to the position that transformational grammar is not a model for a speaker or a hearer, and is therefore immune to psychological evidence'. I think she would like to feel she was doing psychology and not simply linguistics.

Dr Potts, from whose lecture I quoted at the beginning of this foreword, seems to me to want to leave the options open:

> It is no objection to a transformational theory that we are not usually aware of performing computations upon these occasions, for it is typical of a skill which has been learned thoroughly that we are able to exercise it automatically, giving our full attention to that to which it is to be applied and not thinking at all about the rules which we are applying . . . Nor is it any objection that the greater part of learning our native language is achieved without, even initially, being told the computational rules and that most accomplished speakers of the language could not even begin to state them. There are many skills which we acquire by imitation together with trial and error, without at any point being *told*, as contrasted with being *shown*, how to perform the action in question.

It must be mentioned, however, that Potts is very far from being sympathetic to Chomsky. In fact, the positive contribution of his lecture is a radical alternative to transformational grammar.

III

I said, at the beginning of this foreword, that in Part I of it I would expound, and criticise from a Wittgensteinian point of view, the Lockean thesis that communicating consists in conveying ideas or thoughts from one mind to another; that in Part II I would comment on some of the lectures in which things are said which relate to this thesis; and, finally, that I would give a brief indication of the themes of the remaining lectures.

Bernard Harrison, Reader in Philosophy at the University of Sussex, asks what enables a person to sort objects into the categories N, non-N, and doubtfully-N, where 'N' is a general name such as 'man'. He rejects answers in terms of Lockean essences, Quinean 'patterns of stimulation', fundamental capacities to recognise, and family resemblances ('not an answer to our question').

It seems to him that the criteria which determine the limits of application of any one general name are not independent of those determining the limits of application of other general names. For example, in calling X a man we deny that he is an animal. A general name has meaning in the system of language to which it belongs, and its use in communicating with other people depends on a 'community in sorting practice'. Ostensive definitions, by themselves, cannot account for language learning. What a child learns is not a set of correlations between general names and abstract ideas, qualities, or whatever, but 'an array of operations, procedures or practices'. The relation of language and reality is not that of word and *nominatum*; language is grounded not in ostensive definition, but in agreement in usage, which is a form of action.

Amongst the general names to which philosophers have paid considerable attention are those of colours. But their discussions have often been conducted in the absence of any systematic investigation of how, and why, people differ in their colour vocabulary. Dr Barbara Lloyd, Reader in Social Psychology at the University of Sussex, provides a useful and up-to-date survey of the work that has been done on this. Some of it has been directed towards explaining the development of colour vocabularies in an evolutionary sense. Investigators with this model of explanation in mind may be selective in their choice of data. This, Lloyd thinks, 'may result in a failure to appreciate that colour terms are used primarily to communicate with other people'. What would Bernard Harrison say is the significance of this communicative function? Lloyd quotes him as saying, in 1973, that the relationships which are coded in colour terminology '. . . are certainly not brought into existence by the rules of our language: they characterise features of our experience'. I find this puzzling. Judging from the Wittgensteinian flavour of some of the remarks at the end of his lecture I would not have expected him to say that our systems of colour classification are grounded in our experience (cf. Wittgenstein, 1967, 357).

My colleague J. J. Sparkes, Professor of Electronics Design and Communications at the Open University, outlines a programme for research, involving simulation techniques, into the brain processes underlying speech recognition. Since he begins his lecture with a warning about the difficulties of interdisciplinary communication about communication, perhaps it will not be thought inappropriate if I comment briefly on one potential source of

misunderstanding. This is the widespread practice among be-
havioural scientists of using words like 'remember', 'recognise'
and 'inform' (or, more often, 'information') to talk not about
people, but about parts of people's bodies. It is said that a person's
brain remembers, recognises, and so on. One example may serve
to illustrate the confusion to which this practice can give rise. It
may make perfectly good sense to talk of there being a 'match'
between an input to the brain and something already stored, in
some form, in the brain. It may well be the case that whenever a
person recognises something there is such a physiological match.
But to describe the matching in the brain as the brain's perform-
ing an act of recognition is to risk people inferring that *they* cannot
properly be said to recognise something unless they perform an
act of matching, that is, unless they consciously compare what
they hear or see with something they recall, and find there to be a
resemblance. And that would be to make us doubt the propriety
of our actual practice with the word 'recognise', a practice which
rarely involves us in a 'mental process' of comparing what we hear
or see with a mental image (Wittgenstein, 1953, I, 604; 1958,
p. 165).

Roger Fowler, Senior Lecturer in English and American
Studies at the University of East Anglia, complains of those
schools of linguistics which pay no attention to the various kinds
of work language performs in actual communication situations.
For Chomsky, for instance, a sentence is essentially a syntactic
construct responsible for pairing a 'semantic interpretation' with
a 'phonetic representation'. With telling examples, Fowler argues
for a way of analysing texts which differs from the emphasis on
objective, formal structure found in received literary education.
His way – treating literature as discourse – involves treating a text
as a *process*, the communicative interaction of implied speakers and
thus of consciousnesses and communities.

Another way of treating literature, not incompatible with
Fowler's, is to contrast the linguistic usages in literature – and
perhaps particularly those in poetry – with those in ordinary every-
day conversation. It may be said that there is a central area of
language usage where the rules work so well that we scarcely
notice them, and a gradient through to the 'edges' of language,
where usage is less predictable and deviations from norms more
noticeable. Attempts have been made, by Paul Van Buren and
others, to shed light on the nature of religious belief by making use
of this notion of a language gradient. 'God', it has been suggested,

is religion's peculiar way of marking the boundary of language. David Crystal, Professor of Linguistic Science at the University of Reading, is sceptical about the value of the idea of language variety in the elucidation of religious belief. He thinks that the assumption that language is the ultimate determinant of the debate is mistaken. And he refers approvingly to the view of Ebeling that a theory of language needs to be supplemented by a more comprehensive 'theory of life'.

I suggested, earlier, that one of the differences between the 'mental items' and 'accepted common practice' views of what makes communication possible is that holders of the two views attach a different significance to 'rules of language'. The question is: Must speaker and hearer employ a procedure in which they consciously apply a rule? I take the Wittgensteinian answer to be: No; what is said, to be meaningful, must be according to a rule, but the speaker's speech-act need not involve the application of a rule (cf. Wittgenstein, 1958, pp. 14–15). In this connection it is interesting to consider what Karl Britton, formerly Professor of Philosophy at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, says about symbolic actions. A symbol must be correct according to a rule. Habits do not confer rights; there must be a rule we all accept, such as the rule governing the giving of a receipt for payment for purchases. But this does not mean that any thought of the rule need enter into the transaction. Indeed, there may not be any conscious process, simply an appropriate response.

Something else I said earlier was that, on the 'accepted common practice' view of communication, communication is made possible by a kind of *acting*, rather than by a kind of *seeing*. In finding that communication is possible, one realises that there is an agreement in judgments, an agreement which reflects a shared form of life. I think Britton would agree with this, as I do with his concluding remark:

> To be able to interpret symbols in some way or other is to have some understanding of life. Of course it is possible to live without understanding life. I am not one of those who thinks it better to do so.

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NOTES

[1] J. M. Cameron in his inaugural lecture 'Poetry and Dialectic', at Leeds in 1960 (1962, pp. 119–49) rightly attributes the view in question to John Locke, and comments: 'No one when challenged is prepared to say that he is acquainted with anything at all corresponding to Locke's story. It *must* be like that, we sometimes hear; never, I think, Yes, that's how it is. The "must" is here significant.'

2 Wittgenstein (1958), p. 3: 'We are tempted to think that the action of language consists of two parts; an inorganic part, the handling of signs, and an organic part, which we may call understanding these

signs, meaning them, interpreting them, thinking. These latter activities seem to take place in a queer kind of medium, the mind; and the mechanism of the mind, the nature of which, it seems, we don't quite understand, can bring about effects which no material mechanism could.'

[3] Locke (1690, III, ii, 1): 'Man, though he has a great variety of thoughts, and such from which others as well as himself might receive profit and delight; yet they are all within his own breast, invisible and hidden from others, nor can of themselves be made to appear.'

[4] Wittgenstein (1968), p. 319: 'One wishes to say: In order to be able to say that I have toothache I don't observe my behaviour, say in a mirror. *And this is correct*, but it doesn't follow that you describe an observation of any other kind.' See, also, Wittgenstein (1967), Sections 78, 487 and, interestingly, Walsh (1975), pp. 183–9, 'Kant on Self-Knowledge'.

[5] Wittgenstein (1969), Section 204: '. . . the end is not certain propositions striking us immediately as true, i.e. it is not a kind of *seeing* on our part; it is our *acting*, which lies at the bottom of our language-game.'

[6] Wittgenstein (1956), Part II, Section 70: 'If there did not exist an agreement in what we call "red", etc., etc., language would stop.' Cf. Wittgenstein (1967) Section 351.

[7] Wittgenstein (1967), Section 430: 'Our language game only works, of course, when a certain agreement prevails, but the concept of agreement does not enter into the language-game.'

[8] Wittgenstein (1953), Part I, Sections 241–2; Part II, Section xi, p. 226.

[9] I am indebted to Hunter (1973), especially for the essay entitled 'On how we talk', on this and related points.

B