

Geach's 'Refutation' of Austin Revisited

AVNER BAZ
Tufts University
Medford, MA 02155
USA

I Introduction

A characteristic move of what is known as 'ordinary language philosophy' (OLP), as exemplified by J.L. Austin's discussion of knowledge in 'Other Minds,' is to appeal to the ordinary and normal use(s) of some philosophically troublesome word(s), with the professed aim of alleviating this or that philosophical difficulty or dispelling this or that philosophical confusion. This characteristic move has been criticized widely on the grounds that it rests on a conflation of 'meaning' and 'use'; and that criticism has been quite successful in its effect: OLP is widely held nowadays within the mainstream of analytic philosophy to have somehow been refuted or otherwise seriously discredited. However, that the words in question do indeed have something referable to as 'their meaning,' which is not only conceptually distinguishable from their ordinary and normal uses, but also *theoretically separable* from these uses,¹ *in a way that renders misguided the ordinary language philosopher's characteristic appeal and validates the traditional concerns OLP set itself out to dispel*, has

1 On the difference between these two, see Glock (1996).

for the most part merely been presupposed and insisted on, as opposed to argued for, by detractors of OLP.

One exception to this is the so-called Frege-Geach argument. This argument has mostly been discussed in the literature as a serious challenge to 'expressivist' or 'non-cognitivist' theories of moral discourse — a complex issue, which is still very much alive in the literature and which I must here set aside in its entirety. But the argument has also been cited as, and was originally taken by Geach to constitute, a rather powerful, even decisive, consideration in favor of the prevailing conception of (word) meaning, and (hence) against OLP. This paper revisits the Frege-Geach argument, as originally presented by Geach, with the aim of showing that *as an argument against OLP and its procedures* it fails: it does not show what it has widely been taken to show, and does not undermine OLP, as exemplified by 'Other Minds.' On the contrary, a close examination of Geach's argument will actually validate Austin's general *approach* — though importantly not all of his specific contentions about how 'know' and cognates function in ordinary and normal discourse.

By way of providing the reader with an initial orientation, let me sketch the basic conflict, as I see it, between OLP as represented by Austin and the traditional perspective that Geach seeks to defend. The basic assumption made by those who accuse OLP of conflating meaning and use, and which Geach's argument was supposed to validate, is that — barring ambiguity, indexicality, etc. — there is *first* something that the words of a syntactically well-formed sentence, pretty much by themselves and in virtue of something called 'their meanings,' say (or 'express'); and *then* there is the further 'pragmatic' question of use, which is thought of, roughly, as the question of what a speaker's point might be in saying what his words, anyway and irrespective of his point, say.

Commonly, the meaning of at least most words is thought of by the detractors of OLP to be a matter of their 'reference.' Williamson puts the basic idea thus: '[E]xpressions refer to items in the... world, the reference of a complex expression is a function of the reference of its constituents, and the reference of a sentence determines its truth value' (2007, 281). This is taken to be true not just of words like 'chair' and 'red,' but also of philosophically troublesome words like 'know,' 'mean,' 'understand,' 'cause'.... Thus, 'know' and cognates, for example, are taken to have their meaning in virtue of having come to refer to a particular sort of item in the world — namely, the relation of *knowing*, which is supposed to sometimes hold between potential knowers and facts (or true propositions). 'Serious and literal' utterances of syntactically well formed indicative sentences featuring these words are accordingly taken to 'ascribe' — barring ambiguity, indexicality, etc., but otherwise

by virtue of their meaning alone — *knowledge* of some particular fact or proposition to some particular knower.

OLP, as I understand it, questions the prevailing conception of meaning, and of how the meaning of words relates to what may be said by means of them. In particular, it takes this conception to be responsible for any number of traditional philosophical impasses and puzzles. As against the prevailing idea that each of our words *first* refers to something, and only *thereby* becomes suitable for its various uses, OLP proposes that the best way out of philosophical difficulties is to consider things in the reverse order: that is, to take the ordinary and normal use(s) of a philosophically troublesome word as primary, and as the best guide to what, if anything, it refers to, or picks out. For OLP, as I understand and try to defend it in this paper, the basic unit of sense is not a sentence, but *a sentence in use*; and 'use' here refers, as it does in Wittgenstein, to a certain kind of human *achievement* — however humble and everyday — one that contrasts, not with *mentioning* the words, but with *idling*, or *doing no (real) work* with them. This idea has the potential of changing radically the way we understand traditional philosophical difficulties. Or so I shall now turn to argue on Austin's behalf.

II The Work of 'Other Minds'

With the exception perhaps of Strawson's 'Truth' (1949), Austin's 'Other Minds' has probably drawn the most fire from the detractors of OLP. The part of 'Other Minds' in which Austin allegedly conflates meaning and use, and the part on which Geach focuses in his argument, is the part where he argues that what 'I know that...' adds to 'such and such' is not a description of some further purported fact — a fact about the speaker's epistemic relation to such and such, or about some particular mental state of his — but rather is to be understood on the model of what 'I promise...' adds to 'I will do such and such.' To say 'I know that such and such,' according to Austin, is not to describe ourselves at all, but rather to perform — or make explicit our performance of — the speech act of 'giving others our word' and 'giving them our authority' for saying that such and such (1979, 99ff.). Just as Strawson urges that we not be misled by the fact that 'is true' is grammatically 'a singular substantive' into thinking that it is used to 'refer to something' (1950, 130), or is 'a descriptive phrase' (1949, 94), so Austin urges us not to suppose that 'I know' is 'a descriptive phrase' (1979, 103).

I should say outright that Austin's account is importantly incomplete. The use of 'I know' he discusses is in fact *very* rare. Normally, we simply say (claim, assert, inform the other...) that such and such, and then give the other our *basis* for taking it, and for saying, that such and

such, typically upon being asked ‘How do you know?’ — the question upon which Austin focuses in ‘Other Minds.’ In the majority of cases, the other person would be just as competent to assess our basis as we are, and there would therefore be no special authority for us to claim for ourselves, or give. If I have a good basis for my claim, and one, moreover, that I think you would be able to properly appreciate, it would make no sense for me to urge you to trust *me*, or to take *my word* for the obtaining of such and such. The use of ‘I know’ on which Austin focuses would be natural only in situations where the claim that such and such is grounded in some sort of *expertise*, as for example when the claimer is an expert in identifying birds, or perhaps in identifying some particular person’s moods. More generally, this use would be in place where the other is for some reason not in position to assess one’s basis.²

‘I know that such and such’ is far more commonly used in situations in which the obtaining of such and such is *not* in question and no one is in need of being assured of it.³ Think, for example, of the ‘I know’ of sharing a reaction to a piece of purported news,⁴ or the ‘I know’ of acknowledging a significant fact.⁵ Austin, taking his cue from the tradition’s obsession with knowledge as that which supposedly puts one in position to give assurance, ignores such situations. Clearly, the normal use of ‘I know’ in such situations is not analogous to the normal use of ‘I promise’ in the way Austin suggests.

Of course, from the tradition’s perspective both Austin’s observations and my reservations would seem beside the point, since it takes what may illocutionarily be done, and what ordinarily and normally is done with ‘know’ and cognates, as inessential to what knowledge is and (hence) to what ‘know’ means. The tradition, as represented by Geach, takes it that there is one and the same thing that ‘I know that such and such,’ when uttered ‘literally and seriously,’ says of the speaker — namely, that he *knows*, that he stands in the relation of *knowing* to such and such. What things we ordinarily and normally illocutionarily do in uttering these words in different contexts, what the significance or point might be of doing them, when it would be appropriate to use the words in some particular way and how they might felicitously or intelligibly be responded to when thus used... — all of this is taken to

2 I elaborate on this in Baz (2009).

3 Hanfling calls situations of this type ‘commenting’ situations, and contrasts them with ‘enquiring’ situations (2000, 96ff.)

4 ‘Jack and Jill are getting married!’
‘I know!’ (with a tone of excitement or, alternatively, with a sigh).

5 ‘I know I said I would help you; I just haven’t had the time.’

presuppose the meaning of 'know' and what is said ('expressed') in saying 'I know.'

As I read it, 'Other Minds' as a whole is meant to challenge the tradition's perspective. It invites us to take the sorts of questions just listed not as secondary or derivative, but as primary, and as the sorts of questions on which we should focus if we wish to find our way out of the difficulties that have plagued traditional epistemology.

Searle says of Austin that he is 'rather cagey about whether his analysis is supposed to give the meaning of "know"' (1999, 137). But Austin is not cagey at all about this. He *nowhere* claims to be, nor does he present himself as, offering what Searle and others would call an analysis of the meaning of 'know.' He makes clear at the opening of his paper what his aim is: to remind us of 'What we should say if asked "How do you know?";' as a way of dispelling the pervasive notion that how we know that another person is, for example, angry is fundamentally different from how we know that, for example, there's a goldfinch in the garden (1979, 76-7).

By comparing coming to know what bird is in the garden to coming to know what another is feeling, Austin, quite ingeniously to my mind, aims to transform the prevailing way of thinking about knowing other minds: he invites us to consider that coming to know that someone else is, for example, angry is not a matter of drawing an inference from one thing ('behavior') to another ('the anger itself'), but rather is a matter of *recognizing* what he feels and manifests in his behavior to be anger. One important thing this suggests is that the essential difference between our relation to our own feelings and emotions and our relation to the other's feelings and emotions is better seen as metaphysical, and ethical, as opposed to epistemological. The other's anger is his all right — to express in one way or another, or else try to suppress — and not ours. What is for us to do is *respond* to it, in one way or another.⁶ But, epistemologically speaking, both he and we need to (be able to) recognize what he feels to be anger; and both he and we may fail to recognize it correctly. His anger is not a private sensation to which he has privileged access, but rather is a (context-sensitive) 'pattern' to which no particular sensation or set of sensations is either necessary or sufficient (see Austin, 1979, 110).

The details of Austin's argument matter less for our present purposes than the fact that his comparison of 'I know' and 'I promise,' which has drawn so much fire from critics of OLP, occurs within a philosophical context that has been completely ignored by these critics. Once we are

6 On this, see Cavell (1969).

clear on what Austin is *doing* or trying to do in 'Other Minds,' we may well find what he says about the normal force of 'I know that such and such' — *in those situations in which the other is in need of an assurance that such and such* — to be philosophically quite illuminating. In particular, it can be quite illuminating as a response to the long-standing skeptical worry that knowledge is supposed to be infallible ('If I [you] know I [you] can't be wrong') and that it would therefore appear that we fallible creatures can at best know *very* little — whether about other minds or about anything else — and are speaking falsely (almost) whenever we say that we or others know something (see *ibid.*, 98ff). Once we give up the assumption that it must be possible just to 'apply' 'know' or one of its cognates to any pair of knower and fact or proposition without doing anything else, illocutionarily speaking, in doing *that* — the assumption, if you will, that it must be possible to apply the word without employing it⁷ — the question of how we fallible creatures can ever be entitled to say these words becomes no more bewildering and threatening than the question of how we fallible creatures can ever be entitled to say 'Trust me' or 'I assure you' or 'I'm not just saying this,' or, alternatively, 'I heard!' or 'You don't need to tell me.' Indeed, it becomes no more bewildering and threatening than the question of how we fallible creatures can ever be entitled to assert 'Such and such,' in a context in which our utterance may rightfully be taken as the giving of an assurance. This is, or anyway ought to have been, Austin's main point. For Austin, the truth of 'If I (you) know I (you) can't be wrong' is a truth about what competently employing 'know' and cognates, against the inescapable and undeniable background of human fallibility, involves and requires (see 1979, 98); it is not, for him, a truth about some metaphysical relation — the relation of *knowing* — which sometimes just holds between knowers and propositions, irrespectively of whatever might lead us to (wish to) put it into words.

As I already mentioned, there are important uses of 'I know' that Austin does not discuss. There are also, of course, other inflections of the verb. Austin acknowledges that he hasn't discussed all forms of

7 Putting the point this way may be misleading, since, normally, to *apply* something is to make some use of it — do some work with it — whereas the philosopher's 'application' of a word is precisely *not* a use of the word. 'Applying (a word),' as used in contemporary analytic philosophy, is a technical term *par excellence*. As thought of in contemporary analytic philosophy, applying a word is pictured as simply attaching the word to something in the world — just as one might attach a label to an object. But of course, even attaching a label to an object normally has a point, and understanding it is ultimately a matter of seeing that point, whereas the philosopher's 'application of a word' has no (non-theoretical) point. I elaborate this point, and the significance of this point, in Baz (forthcoming b).

indicative sentences featuring 'know' and cognates. He claims, however, that other inflections of the verb are not 'worrying' in the way that 'I know...' is (1979, 98, fn. 1). Here, as elsewhere, Austin strikes me as too quick. Here, as elsewhere, he fails to pursue clearly, patiently, and far enough his own insights and philosophical instincts. For surely, there *are* uses of 'know' and cognates that may aptly be called 'descriptive'; these uses are not peripheral to the meaning of these words, or to our concept of knowledge; and the traditional epistemologist is likely to insist, as against Austin, that *he*, at any rate, is interested in the descriptive or representational dimension of the concept — in the question of when and under what conditions 'know that' or one of its cognates (truly) applies to some pair of person and proposition, regardless of what might further be done with these words beyond sheer application.

The main lesson of 'Other Minds' as a whole — a lesson that is dramatized, but therefore also obscured, by the comparison of 'I know' and 'I promise' — is that 'know' and cognates are just not fit for, there is no good reason to expect them to sponsor, the philosopher's 'application' — the sheer attachment of word to item or case. Their ordinary and normal application, *both* when aptly describable as 'descriptive' and when aptly describable as 'non-descriptive,' is too tightly connected to the point of the application — to what Austin refers to as the 'intents and purposes' that guide and inform the application and to which it is ultimately answerable (1979, 84). At the root of the apparently interminable debates between skeptics and anti-skeptics, fallibilists and anti-fallibilists, contextualists and anti-contextualists, and so on, is the adoption, by *both* parties, of the assumption that it ought, in principle, to be possible for us just to apply (truly or falsely) 'know' and cognates to any pair of person and proposition — not, perhaps, apart from any particular context, but — apart from any particular context of *significant use*.⁸

As I read it, Austin's essay invites us to consider that there is no better way out of the above debates than to give up that assumption and concern ourselves precisely with what it has led us to regard as

8 This description is likely to strike the reader as untrue of contemporary 'contextualists.' In Baz (2009) and Baz (forthcoming) I argue that this description is essentially true of contemporary contextualists as well. Contemporary contextualists argue that the 'semantic content' of 'knowledge ascriptions' depends in part on the 'context' in which they are made; but the question of the *point* of the 'ascription' — the question of what specific *work* is supposed to be done by means of 'know' — does not, for them, affect the determination of the context and therefore does not affect the 'semantic content' of the ascription.

inessential to the meaning of ‘know,’ or to our concept of knowledge — namely, the different uses of ‘know’ and cognates, and the human needs, interests, and concerns, that give them their specific point and to which, ultimately, they are answerable.

III The ‘Frege-Geach’ Argument Revisited

Like many other critics of OLP, Geach does not ask what philosophical work is supposed to be done by the appeal to ordinary language and what traditional philosophical difficulties have made that work called for. Instead, he begins, like many others, by attributing to the ordinary language philosopher the ambition of coming up with an ‘analysis’ or ‘theory’ of some word or expression, and of doing so by describing just one particular thing or set of things that may illocutionarily be done in uttering a sentence of a very particular form that features this word or expression.⁹ Geach’s argument is supposed to show that the meaning of that philosophically troublesome word or expression is theoretically separable from its ordinary and normal use, in a way that validates traditional philosophical difficulties and undermines OLP’s general way of trying to dissolve them. More specifically, Geach’s argument is supposed to show that the meaning of words is enough for determining what someone who uttered a syntactically well-formed sentence featuring these words would be saying — what Fregean ‘thought’ she would be ‘expressing’ — irrespective of what work, if any, she might be doing with her words.

The declared target of Geach’s argument is ‘anti-descriptive theorists.’ As I already mentioned, the argument has often been discussed as an argument against ‘expressivist’ or ‘non-cognitivist’ accounts of moral discourse.¹⁰ Originally, however, it was presented by Geach as an argument against anti-descriptive theories of the meaning of this or

9 See, for example, Searle (1999, 137ff), and Soames (2003, 115ff). Soames is focusing on Strawson’s 1949 essay on Truth, but he generalizes the attribution of the ambition to come up with an ‘analysis’ or ‘theory’ of some philosophically troublesome word or expression to ‘the ordinary language philosopher’ (cf. 129). I also believe that the attribution of the ambition to Strawson is uncharitable, especially in the light of his 1950 sequel to the 1949 paper; but that’s an issue for a different occasion.

10 On the face of it, Geach’s argument is better designed to give trouble to accounts such as Hare’s (1952) account of ‘good,’ in which something like an analysis of the meaning of the word in question *is* on offer, than to accounts such as Austin’s account of ‘I know,’ which do not purport to give anything like an analysis of the word or expression in question, but only to point out and clarify aspects of its use that bear on some particular philosophical difficulty or set of difficulties.

that particular word, not against anti-descriptive theories of this or that region of discourse.¹¹ Among the anti-descriptive theories he says he means to 'refute' is Austin's 'theory' that 'to say, "I know that p" is no statement about my own mental capacities, but is an act of warranting my hearer that p' (1965, 462).

Geach begins by noting that sentences of the form 'I know that such and such' may be embedded in longer sentences — for example, in 'If... then...' constructions. Austin, recall, argues that 'I know that such and such' is not normally used for predicating a relation — the relation of knowing — of the speaker and such and such, but rather is in the business of warranting the other that such and such, explicitly giving her our authority, for example, to say that such and such. It is clear, however, that whatever work may be done by 'I know that such and such' when embedded in an 'If... then...' construction, it isn't the work that according to Austin the un-embedded sentence is used to perform.

Geach anticipates the counter-objection that he simply has pointed to *another* use of 'I know' — one in which Austin was, for good or bad reason, not interested (1965, 463). This is why he moves on to what he regards as weightier considerations. But since there are many who believe that the so-called 'embedding' possibility is, as such, a very serious problem for accounts such as Austin's account of 'I know,' let me say a word about this alleged problem in its general form.

There's a very good reason why Austin focuses on simple 'indicative' sentences, in which 'know' or one of its cognates is being applied to a pair of knower and fact (or proposition). Austin focuses on this particular form of sentences, *because he is responding to the tradition*. Virtually all of the main difficulties encountered by the tradition in trying to give an account of knowledge have to do with the 'application' of 'know(s)' to 'cases.' *When and under what conditions does anyone know something? Do we (ever) know this or that? Can we?* These are the basic sorts of questions that have plagued the tradition — the sorts of questions that the tradition has taken to be basic. How, the tradition's perspective would incline us to ask, can we reasonably hope to understand a sentence such as 'If I know that Smith painting is a forgery (and I am no expert), then the forgery is clumsy' (Geach, 1965, 463) — which presumably is (to be) used for asserting that the relation of 'natural (factive) meaning' holds between the speaker's *knowing* that the painting is forged, and the forg-

11 I take it that Geach's argument would not have so much as even *seemed* to work against the position that the *whole* of moral discourse has the "aesthetic" force of, say, *urging* or *inviting* others to see things our way, as opposed to that of *informing* them or *letting them know* that 'this is how things morally stand.'

ery being clumsy — if we do not know when, if ever, someone counts or ought to count as knowing that a painting is forged?

This is why Austin invites us to look more closely and without prejudice precisely at those speech acts in which ‘know(s)’ is being applied to a particular case — in which, so it would seem, we say *of* someone (who may be ourselves) *that* he or she knows (or does not know) something. His basic aim, as I said, is to get us to see that, outside of philosophical theorizing, we simply do not apply our words in the philosopher’s sense of ‘apply.’ Rather, we put them to use; and our utterances are (to be) understood and assessed in the light of that use. And this, I said, is good reason for suspecting that the philosophically troublesome words may not be fit for the philosopher’s ‘application,’ which in turn would explain the fact that when we theorize on the basis of the assumption that they must be, we run into seemingly insurmountable difficulties. This is what Austin, as I read him, is trying to get us to see. The so-called ‘embedding problem’ would only seem to undermine his argument to someone who failed to see its point, and presupposed the prevailing conception of meaning.

Geach himself, as I said, appears to be aware of this. He does not put much stock in the sheer ‘embedding problem,’ at least not in his 1965 paper. His ‘refutation’ of Austin and other ‘anti-descriptive theorists’ proceeds rather from the (presumed) fact that, for example, both ‘I know that such and such’ and ‘If I know that such and such, then...’ can be used as *different premises in one and the same formally valid argument*. ‘[The] possibility of varying use...,’ he contends, ‘cannot be appealed to in cases where an ostensibly assertoric utterance “*p*” and “If *p*, then *q*” can be teamed up as premises for a *modus ponens* [for “*p*” read “I know that such and such”]. Here, the two occurrences of “*p*,” by itself and in the “if” clause, must have the same sense if the *modus ponens* is not to be vitiated by equivocation’ (1965, 463). Geach continues:

For example, Austin would maintain that if I say assertorically, ‘I know Smith’s Vermeer is a forgery,’ this is not an asserted proposition about me, but an act of warranting my hearers that the picture is a forgery. Austin never observed that this alleged nonproposition could function as a premise obeying ordinary logical rules, in inferences, like this:

I know Smith’s Vermeer is a forgery.

I am no expert.

If I know Smith’s Vermeer is a forgery, and I am no expert, then Smith’s Vermeer is a very clumsy forgery.

Ergo, Smith’s Vermeer is a very clumsy forgery.

Still less did Austin discuss *how* a nonproposition could be a premise. But failing such discussion, Austin’s account of ‘I know’ is valueless. (ibid.)

Presumably, Austin's whole point was to show that (the un-embedded) 'I know that such and such' *never* functions 'descriptively' — what Geach would call 'propositionally'; for even if it only *sometimes* functioned descriptively, and therefore manifestly *could* thus function, this would *seem* to validate the philosopher's worry about knowledge's infallibility and its seemingly implied skepticism — precisely the worry that Austin meant to dispel.¹² According to Geach, however, premises are essentially descriptive, or propositional; so if 'I know that such and such' *could* function as a premise, this would be enough to undermine Austin's account, by Geach's light.

Even more problematic for Austin is supposed to be the (presumed) fact that 'I know that such and such' functions, in Geach's example, both as a separate premise and as part of an 'If... then...' sentence in another premise, in a single *valid inference*. Valid inferences, as Geach thinks of them, are supposed to abstract from the Austinian question of what's being done with the words, or how the words 'function in discourse.' Validity, as Geach thinks of it, is supposed to be a function of ('descriptive') *meaning abstracted from use*, in the way that according to Austin (as I read him) the meaning of 'know' may not be. If 'know' and cognates may unproblematically be employed in logically valid inferences of the sort imagined by Geach, this by itself would be good reason for thinking that they have a meaning of the sort assumed for them by the critics of OLP. But of course, that these words may thus unproblematically be employed is what Geach's example ought to have shown. Has it?

The mere fact that we can plug a sentence of the 'I know that such and such' form in the place of '*p*' in the schema for *modus ponens* does not prove Geach's point. For his point to be proven the result must not *merely* be a string of familiar words making up sentences that in turn are organized in the form of *modus ponens*. Geach, I think, knows this. He takes himself to be presenting us with a stretch of discourse that we clearly and unproblematically *understand*. Do we?

I note first that, while sounding remotely *like* something that someone might naturally say under suitable circumstances, the *modus ponens* argument Geach imagines for us is *not* something that someone might naturally utter outside philosophy. Geach's imagined argument would be awkward in an everyday conversation in the way that something like, for example, 'What a clumsy forgery; even I can tell that this is not a real Vermeer' would not be. It would be extremely odd for anyone

12 In Baz (forthcoming a) I argue that descriptive uses of 'know' and cognates do not in fact validate the skeptical worry.

(who was not trying to prove a philosophical point about 'know') to actually utter Geach's imagined argument.

But of course, since Geach wrote Grice came up with his theory of 'implicature' (1989), Searle purportedly exposed the 'assertion fallacy' (1999: 141ff), and we have all been trained in explaining away the oddness or gross unnaturalness of certain stretches of philosophical discourse by attributing their oddness or unnaturalness to 'pragmatic,' or otherwise '*extra-semantic*,' factors. We are supposed to reason thus:

Geach's imagined argument is clear, and makes perfect sense. It is only the speech-act of expressing it that would be odd or unnatural. What we need to explain is precisely why coming out with a stretch of discourse that makes perfect sense, semantically speaking, would be odd or unnatural; and there are any number of possible explanations: the argument is just too formal for everyday use; the argument, or anyway some parts of it, would be so obvious as to not be worth expressing; in actually uttering the argument, or some parts of it, we would implicate false things or things that for some other reason we might not wish to implicate; there might be various more or less complex but merely psychological causes for our not being inclined to come out with just this form of words, or for our finding them odd or unnatural...

The above general line of reasoning, which one hears everywhere, misconstrues OLP and begs the question against it. It presupposes, as Brandom puts it, 'a prior, independent, classical semantics' (2008, 8). By 'prior' and 'independent' Brandom means prior to and independent of the use(s) of the words in question. And by 'classical semantics' he is referring to the prevailing conception of word-meaning, and of how it relates to sentence-meaning and to the determination of what someone is saying by means of her words. That prevailing conception is what OLP questions — both in its own right, and as responsible for any number of philosophical difficulties.

Both Grice and Searle give a false and misleading account of the point of departure of OLP. Both suggest that the ordinary language philosopher *begins* by 'noticing,' or with the 'observation,' that a particular form of words that the philosopher has produced is such that it would be 'odd' or 'inappropriate' or 'bizarre' to utter it under normal circumstances, or apart from some special circumstances (Grice 1989, 3 and 235; Searle 1999, 141-2). Grice and Searle would have us think that what would and would not be appropriate to say under, or apart from, this or that set of circumstances is *all* the ordinary language philosopher has got to go on in his criticism of the philosopher's words. And then they offer their counter-explanation of the ordinary language philosopher's alleged data: What the philosopher says is perfectly clear, and in particular is either true or false; it's just that *actually saying it* apart from the appropriate circumstances — where, again, it is assumed that there is no question about the identity of the *it* that would be said — would

somehow be inappropriate or misleading or otherwise conversationally infelicitous.¹³ To support their counter-explanation, they remind us that *any* English sentence — even a sentence as simple and (presumably) impossible not to understand as 'This pillar-box is red' (Grice 1989, 235) or 'He has five fingers on his left hand' (Searle 1999, 143) — would strike us as utterly odd if uttered in circumstances in which we could find no point for it. For all that, they insist, it would be clear *what* its utterer was saying, even if not *why* he said it; and what he would say could very well still be *true*. In fact, its being obviously or trivially true may be precisely the reason why we find the speaker's saying it odd.

All of this *might* have been philosophically pertinent, *if* the ordinary language philosopher really began where Grice and Searle say he begins. But he doesn't. He doesn't find the philosopher's utterance merely odd, or bizarre, or out of place, and certainly does not find it obviously or trivially true. He finds it lacking in (clear) sense, or only capable of making sense in ways that would actually undermine the philosopher's project.¹⁴

'The moral of Grice's work,' Stanley writes, 'is that the facts of linguistic use are the product of two factors, meaning and conversational norms.' 'Failure to absorb this fact,' he continues, 'undermines many of the main theses of ordinary language philosophy' (2008, 412). But the moral of Grice's work was begged by him from the start, and is utterly beside the point as a response to OLP; and Stanley's alleged fact is not a fact, but rather is a theoretical construction that is being forced upon the facts. Just like Grice, Stanley relies on an understanding of 'meaning' that OLP finds both highly questionable in itself and responsible for any number of philosophical difficulties. And the 'facts of linguistic use' Grice's theory of 'implicature' purports to explain are in turn mostly irrelevant to an assessment of OLP, since what concerns OLP is not the conditions under which it would be conversationally appropriate to say something that is otherwise perfectly clear, but rather the conditions under which uttering a string of words would amount to so much as saying something (clear) — something, for example, that may felicitously be assessed in terms of truth and falsity, or validity and invalidity, and which we might choose, for whatever reason, to keep to ourselves.

13 See Conant (1998), for an argument on behalf of Wittgenstein against the prevailing assumption that (barring indexicality, ambiguity, etc.) every declarative sentence has a determinate and truth-evaluable something that *it*, as such, says.

14 This point is pressed especially clearly and compellingly, in response to Grice, by Travis (1991).

It is true that the ordinary language philosopher, upon encountering a stretch of philosophical discourse that he suspects of being ultimately nonsensical, or only fit for making sense in ways that would actually undermine the philosophical purpose(s) for which it was produced, characteristically appeals to the ordinary and normal use of key words in that stretch of discourse. But, pace Searle, Grice, Soames (2003, 129), and others, this appeal is not meant to prove, all by itself, that the stretch of discourse makes no sense. It is meant, rather, to weaken the hold of the conviction that it *must* make sense, because it consists of familiar words that are put together syntactically correctly; and it is also meant to force upon those who take that stretch of discourse to make clear sense the question of what that sense might be, and whether, given the sense or senses it could have — the way(s) in which it may aptly be *understood* — it is fit to do the philosophical work that its author needs or wants it to do.

Go back to Geach's imagined argument. The argument's hypothetical author says, 'I know Smith's Vermeer is a forgery.' What does, or could, he mean? What (work) is he, or might he be, doing with his words? Geach would have us suppose that this is beside the point; and of course, it *is* beside the point as far as the *formal* validity of the argument goes. But then, as far as *that* goes, we could have stayed with 'p' and 'q,' or could have replaced the two tokens of 'I know that Smith's Vermeer is a forgery' in Geach's imagined argument with two 'I Φ 's. If Geach's example is to show that '(I) know' has a *meaning* separable from its use(s), and that, therefore, any utterance of 'I know that such and such' expresses a Fregean 'thought' regardless of what (work) is done with the words or how they are meant, it must at least be possible for us to *understand* the example, and to understand it as an example of *an intelligible stretch of human discourse* — an *argument*, for example — in which 'I know' *functions meaningfully*. And insofar as we are looking for *this* sort of understanding, how the argument's (or "argument's") utterer could or might mean his words, or use them, is very much to the point.

I note first that the utterer of Geach's imagined argument *need not* mean the 'I know' of the first "premise" 'descriptively.' If in uttering the first sentence of Geach's imagined argument the speaker meant to express — not *report* — *conviction* ('I just *know* it's a forgery!'), as he well might with such a sentence, then I think he could aptly be described as having put his 'I know' to a 'non-descriptive' use. (I do not say that his utterance would have *no* 'descriptive' content; I only say that his 'know' would carry no such content.) It would then indeed be forced and misleading to say that he expressed a *premise* with his first sentence, and it would not be clear how he meant, or could mean, the third sentence of the 'argument.' Overall, the 'argument' would clearly be flawed. You

might say, with Geach, that 'the argument would be vitiated by equivocation'; but this would be to force Geach's 'descriptivist' conception of meaning upon the case. For the speaker would not be *referring to two different things* by his 'I know.' Rather, he would be *doing* one thing with it in the first 'premise,' and *doing* nothing clear with it in uttering the third 'premise.' The overall result would be incomprehensible. It would not be clear what the speaker said, or meant to be saying, in uttering the 'argument.' There would just be the uttering of a grammatically well-constructed string of familiar words.

Suppose, on the other hand, that in uttering the first sentence in Geach's imagined argument the speaker meant simply to *inform* the other — simply to let *her* know — that *this* (the painting's being a forgery) is something he happens to know, perhaps in response to the proposal or insinuation that he had no idea whether it was or it wasn't. This, it seems to me, is as descriptive a use of 'I know' as Geach could plausibly be granted here.

There would still be the question that Austin makes so much of in 'Other Minds,' however, of *how* the purported knower purportedly knows — what his basis was for saying he knew. And that question is crucial here precisely because we are trying to imagine a context in which knowledge is not *merely claimed*, but is, or can at least fairly easily become, something like a foregone conclusion. Simply to claim that Smith's Vermeer is a clumsy forgery is one thing; but in order felicitously to *infer* that it is, *from the fact that one knows* it is a forgery, one's knowledge had better be more than merely claimed.¹⁵

Consider now what would become of Geach's imagined argument if the speaker's basis for asserting the first premise were that he was informed of the painting's being a forgery by an expert who had examined the painting, or that Smith himself told him that it was, or that he was there, hiding behind a curtain, when Smith commissioned the forgery. At least in many ordinary contexts this would settle the question of whether the speaker knew — *not* somehow absolutely, but 'for present intents and purposes.' I think it is clear, however, that *something* would be wrong with the argument (or "argument") in that case. And what should we say about the even more extreme case of infelicity in which the imagined speaker asserts the first premise on the force of *one* basis, but then has a *different* basis in mind when asserting the third premise?

15 Compare Wittgenstein: 'It needs to be *shown* (proven, *erwiesen*) that no mistake was possible. Giving the assurance "I know" doesn't suffice. For it is after all only an assurance that I can't be wrong; and it needs to be *objectively* established that I am not wrong about *that*' (1969, remark 15).

The traditional or 'classical' conception of meaning would lead one to insist that in none of those cases would the validity of Geach's imagined argument be affected. It would be insisted, along Gricean-Searlean lines, that the argument would still be valid, 'semantically' speaking, even if utterly incoherent 'pragmatically' as a speech-act. The speaker's first 'I know Smith's Vermeer is a forgery,' it would be insisted, refers to *knowledge* — a particular kind of relation that sometimes holds between knowers and facts, or propositions — and attributes *it* to the speaker and the proposition that the painting is a forgery, regardless of how it is meant and what basis the speaker has for claiming to know; and the third premise in Geach's imagined argument simply says that if a non-expert has come to stand in the relation of *knowing* to the proposition that Smith's painting is a forgery, this factively ('naturally') means that the forgery is clumsy.

By now it should have become clear, however, that the traditional semanticist's insistence on there being strict separation between what is said by means of 'I know that such and such' and what might entitle one to say it, commits him to maintaining that *the third premise in Geach's imagined argument is just false*, regardless of the basis or bases the speaker might have (in mind): *Just* from the fact that a non-expert *knows* that a painting is a forgery — whatever *knowing* this might be thought to come to here¹⁶ — it simply does not follow that the forgery is clumsy. And now I think we should want to know how two generations of readers have missed this seemingly glaring fact about Geach's imagined argument.

As competent speakers, we are generally quite good at hearing the words of others so as to make the most sense of them — seeing through them, as it were, to their intended point. My proposal is that Geach's readers have done the same: knowing quite well what Geach's imagined speaker was *meant* by Geach to be *trying to say* — what point that speaker was supposed by Geach to be intending to make — they have managed to hear it in, or through, the imagined speaker's words. When engaged in everyday discourse, this ability to see the speaker's point in, through, and sometimes even despite, her words, is essential. It can become detrimental, however, when, doing philosophy, we reflect upon what purports to be an example of a perfectly intelligible and unprob-

16 The aim of this clause is to remind the reader that after two and a half millennia of western philosophy, and a century or so of analytic philosophy, we still have no satisfying answer to the metaphysician's question of what knowledge is, and therefore also no satisfying answer to the 'classical' semanticist's question of what 'know' means.

lematic stretch of human discourse — an example, moreover, that is supposed to teach us something important about '(I) know.'

Geach would have us assume that it does not matter what the argument's utterer does with his 'I know,' or how he means or uses it. But I think it is clear that he actually wants, and needs, the speaker's two utterances of 'I know' to be heard in a *very* particular way. He wants and needs the speaker's 'I know' to be heard as something like 'I can tell (or see),' or, better yet, 'even *I* can tell (or see).' (Note that here 'tell' means something like 'discern' or 'distinguish,' not 'give an account' or 'relate.')

And indeed, replace the two occurrences of 'I know' in Geach's imagined argument with 'even *I* can tell,' and you get a stretch of discourse that, while probably too formal to naturally be used by anyone in an everyday situation, would nonetheless *make sense* if used in the appropriate context. Informal versions of similar arguments probably have featured in the course of human history.

Our question therefore ought to be whether 'I know' *may* be used as Geach wants and needs it to be used — whether it may *competently* be meant, and heard, as he wants and needs it to be meant and heard. I believe that the correct answer to this question is *no*; but before I argue for this, I want to point out that even if the correct answer were *yes*, this would not show that the meaning of 'I know' is such that it may simply and unproblematically be plugged into a valid, and possibly sound, argument of (for example) the *modus ponens* form. Rather, it would show that the meaning of 'I know' is such that, *when used in an appropriate context in some very particular way*, it may contribute to a valid and possibly also sound *modus ponens* argument. This would perhaps show Austin's account to be incomplete even by the lights of *his* purposes — which, as I said, I believe it is — but it would *not* undermine his *approach*. Nor would it validate in any way the notion of (word) meaning that he and other ordinary language philosophers have questioned and that Geach wishes to validate. I'll come back to this in the final section.

Let me say why I think 'I know' and 'I can tell (or see)' are not interchangeable in the way Geach needs them to be. For Geach's imagined argument to make the sense he wants it to make, 'I know' must be interchangeable with 'I can tell (or see)' *when both are used descriptively*. When used descriptively, however, they are not interchangeable. And this is due not merely to the fact that 'knowing that' is *more general* than 'telling (by looking) that.' Rather, it is a fact of what Wittgenstein calls 'grammar' that telling (or seeing) that such and such, by looking, is not a way of knowing, but rather is a way of *coming* to know.

This connects with a potentially significant inaccuracy in Williamson's (2000) account of knowledge. Williamson says that *seeing that*, *recognizing that*, *remembering that*, etc., are all 'factive stative attitudes' and argues that *knowing that* is 'the most general factive stative attitude'

(2000, 34). Accordingly, he says that ‘if one knows that A, then there is a specific way in which one knows; one can see or remember or... that A’ (2000, 34). But none of the ‘factive stative attitudes’ Williamson lists is a way of knowing. They all are ways of *coming* to know. Thus we may ask, for example, ‘When did you see that such and such?’ but not, or anyway not in the same sense, ‘When did you know that such and such?’ And we may ask, ‘How long have you known that such and such?’ but not, or anyway not in the same sense, ‘How long have you seen that such and such?’ If one wants to follow Williamson in calling seeing — *by looking* — that such and such a mental *state*, then one must keep in mind that, *unlike knowledge*, it is, conceptually (‘grammatically’), a *momentary* state.

‘Being able to tell (or see)’ would accordingly mean something like ‘being able to come to know (in some particular way),’ which under no plausible understanding is equivalent to ‘knowing.’ Saying of myself that I know — in order, say, to inform the other — is therefore under no plausible understanding the same as saying of myself that I can tell or see. What entails that a forgery is clumsy is not a non-expert’s having come to stand in the philosophically elusive relation of *knowing* to the painting’s being a forgery — whatever standing in that relation to a fact might be thought to come to. What entails it, rather, is the fairly-straightforwardly-establishable *empirical fact* that even a non-expert can tell (or see), just by looking at or examining the painting, that the painting is a forgery.

What makes the oddness — and ultimate incomprehensibility — of Geach’s imagined “argument” easier to miss is the fact that, under appropriate circumstances, ‘I know’ and ‘I can tell’ *may* be used more or less interchangeably. They may thus be used, however, precisely when both are used to express conviction. We can imagine the person standing in front of the picture and exclaiming either ‘I (just) know it’s a forgery!’ or ‘I can (just) tell it’s a forgery!’ and it does not seem to matter much which of the two he would actually use. In such a context, either expression would also be replaceable without loss by ‘I’m sure it’s a forgery!’¹⁷ As already noted, however, if we hear the first “premise” in Geach’s imagined argument as the expression of conviction, it becomes extremely difficult — to say the least — to make sense of the “argu-

17 Compare Wittgenstein: ‘The difference between the concept of “knowing” and the concept of “being certain” isn’t of any great importance at all, except where “I know” is meant to mean: I *can’t* be wrong. In a law-court, for example, “I am certain” could replace “I know” in every piece of testimony. We might even imagine its being forbidden to say “I know” there’ (1969, remark 8).

ment" as a whole, not to mention making sense of it as an *argument*, or *inference*.

Geach's imagined example of piece of human discourse, which is supposed to be an example of a valid inference featuring 'I know,' and as such is supposed to show that '(I) know' has a meaning separable from its use(s), doesn't ultimately make sense — in the simple sense that it is just not clear how a competent speaker could mean it, or how *it* (as opposed to its utterer) might reasonably be understood. So far as I can tell, the example only shows that you can take a sentence of the 'I know that such and such' form and plug it twice into the schema for a *modus ponens* argument, which is hardly news. It does nothing to show that '(I) know' has something referable to as 'its meaning,' which is theoretically separable from how it functions in discourse. Nor does it show Austin's general approach to be wrongheaded, or his account 'valueless.' But then one feels that Geach never did ask himself what value Austin's account was designed, and supposed by its author, to have.

IV Objection and Response

It might be objected: *Granted, Geach chose a bad example. The third premise in his imagined argument is false; and it would (therefore?) be odd for a competent employer of 'know' to come out with such an 'argument.'* But why make such heavy weather of this, instead of simply looking for a better example that would illustrate the point Geach was trying to establish? For example:

- (1) *I know he was married before.*
- (2) *I'm not one of his close friends.*
- (2) *If I know he was married before, and I'm not one of his close friends, then it's not much of a secret that he was married before.*

Therefore:

*It's not much of a secret that he was married before.*¹⁸

Surely, there is nothing wrong with this argument.

18 Another form of inference featuring 'know' would be practical syllogisms, in which someone's knowing something is not supposed to naturally (factively) entail some other fact, as it was supposed to do in Geach's example, but rather is presented as committing the knower to doing or not doing something. I focus on the use of 'know' and cognates in such contexts in Baz (forthcoming a), and argue that it does not undermine the main lesson of 'Other Minds,' which is that we ought to give up the assumption that 'know' and cognates have a (descriptive) meaning separable from their different uses.

In response, let me say, first, that it was important for me to discuss Geach's actual example, as opposed to a "better" one, because Geach, and any number of other competent employers of 'know' who read his article, have taken his imagined "argument" to make sense as a human utterance, when in fact it doesn't. Geach and his readers only *thought* it made sense; they *thought* they understood it. And if such hallucination of sense, as we might call it, can happen to us even with what presents itself as a stretch of ordinary discourse, how much greater must be the danger that this should happen to us with a stretch of philosophical discourse?¹⁹ The practice of OLP, as I understand it, is largely meant to help us identify and overcome such hallucinations of sense, the possibility and significance of which Geach and other detractors of OLP have failed to aptly appreciate.

In the case of ordinary discourse, I said, we see beyond the words to their point; and, if we are competent, we respond appropriately to *it*. But in philosophical theorizing of the sort questioned by OLP there is no point to the words beyond that of 'tracking and recording the truth.' What sustains the hallucination of sense in philosophy is therefore not the perceived point of the words, but something else. Wittgenstein calls it 'pictures.' This is too large of a topic to develop here; but it was important for me to flag it out.

The second thing to say in response to the above objection is that the alternative example it offers on Geach's behalf does not show that 'I know (he was married before)' has a meaning that, all by itself and irrespective of the use made of the words, determines what fact about oneself one would state in uttering it ('literally and seriously'). Rather, we can understand the example as an intelligible stretch of human discourse, and so understand the first premise (for example), precisely because, or to the extent that, we can see what point would be made by means of the words in a suitable context. It's not that we are able to understand the first premise (for example) just by virtue of knowing what it is to *know* that your friend was married before, or what 'knowing that your friend was married before' means. (Nor are we able to understand the second premise just by virtue of knowing the meaning of 'being a close friend,' or to understand the conclusion just by virtue of knowing the meaning of 'being much of a secret.')

Rather, we understand the premises and the inference as a whole, and would be able to respond to them competently — challenge them, for example — only because, or to the extent that, we can see what point the utterer of the words would be making.

19 On this, see Conant (1998, 246-7).

And once we do see that point, we ought to also see that *this* use of 'I know' does not undermine Austin's basic point as presented in Section II. For this use is only in place, or possible, in a context in which what's said to be known is *not* in question (among the participants). Here, 'I know that such and such' means something like 'I (too) have come to possess the information, have learned, that such and such,' in a context in which no one has doubted that such and such. What shows that it's not much of a secret that the speaker's friend was married before is not the fact that the speaker *knows* — in the philosopher's sense of 'has conclusive evidence' or 'can prove' — he was married before, but rather the fact that (even) *the speaker* knows (has heard, has found out). The speaker is not here *claiming* to know, let alone claiming to *know*, that his friend was married before. The context invoked in this example is precisely *not* the 'skeptical' context that concerns Austin in the relevant passages from 'Other Minds.' No one who did not *already* assume that 'I know,' however used, always says of the speaker the same thing — *that he knows*, that he stands in the metaphysical relation of *knowing* to some fact or proposition — and that *knowing* something always comes to the same thing, would take the example offered above on Geach's behalf to undermine Austin's philosophical point. And, again, it is precisely this assumption that Geach's argument was supposed, but fails, to *establish*.²⁰

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