Part Two
MEANING AND TRUTH

NOTE: This is part of A.Sloman's 1962 Oxford DPhil Thesis
"Knowing and Understanding"
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Chapter Two

PROPOSITIONS AND MEANINGS

2.A. **Criteria of identity**

2.A.1. Before we can explain how the analytic-synthetic distinction and the necessary-contingent distinction are to be applied, and discuss the question whether they divide things up differently or not, we must be sure we know what sorts of things they are meant to distinguish. This applies also to the true-false distinction. Sometimes it is not clear whether philosophers think these distinctions apply to sentences or to statements or to ways of knowing, or something else, (c.f. section 6.A) and this leads them into ambiguity and confusion. I shall apply the distinctions to statements or propositions, which are expressed by sentences. When I talk about **statements**, I am talking about sentences together with the meanings they are understood or intended to have. When I talk about **propositions**, I shall be talking about the meanings of sentences (as understood by some person or group of persons). I shall often use the words “statement” and “proposition” interchangeably, as the difference between them is important only in contexts in which we are concerned about the actual form of words used to express a proposition.

But this leaves unanswered the question: what is the meaning of a sentence, or the meaning which it is taken by some person or persons to have? The only way to answer this question is to describe the ways in which words and sentences can be used with meanings or understood
with meanings, and to say clearly how to tell whether two words or sentences are used or understood with the same meaning or not. That is to say, we must describe criteria for identity of meanings and propositions. I shall show presently how the failure to do this may lead to confusion and the begging of questions.

It will not be possible to answer all questions about identity of meanings in this chapter. A few rather vague remarks, concerning very general facts about languages, will be made in section 2.B. Section 2.C explains why it is necessary to use physical properties to provide criteria for identity of meanings of descriptive words, and section 2.D attempts to show that this is not a circular procedure, nor completely trivial. But first of all a few general remarks about criteria of identity will help to explain why all this discussion is necessary.

(It should be noted that most of the general remarks of this Chapter will be presupposed in all that follows.)

2.A.2. Why should we talk about criteria for identity of meanings? Talk about true or false statements, or about meanings or propositions, is not merely talk about sentences or words, for these are merely signs, and cannot, as such, be true or false, or uniquely identify the sense which has been given to them. We cannot tell simply by looking at the shape of a mark which someone has drawn, or by listening to the sound he utters, what he means by it, or how others will understand it. For one hearer or reader may understand it in one way, while another understands it differently, and both may have failed to understand what the author meant by it. What is more, one and the same person may understand different
tokens of the same type of word or sentence differently on different occasions, or in different contexts. (It is sometimes suggested or implied that this is entirely due to ambiguities in words or expressions which refer to particular objects, expressions such as “John”, “the tree on the corner”, “you”, and so on, but it is important not to forget that descriptive words may also be ambiguous, though perhaps less systematically.) Talking about meanings presupposes that we know what it means to talk about the absence of ambiguity, that we have some way of telling when words or sentences are understood or intended to have the same meanings. So we need some way of identifying the meanings with which words are used and the propositions which they are intended, or taken, to express. How can this be done?

2.A.3. There must be an answer to this question, for we are quite used to talking about meanings: we can ask what a word means in German, whether two words mean the same in English, and whether two persons mean the same by the word “tadpole”. In learning to speak we implicitly learn the answers to questions about identification. We learn to apply tests for telling whether two persons mean the same by a word, whether two words mean the same in a language, and so on. We learn how to pick out the occasions when we are using words inconsistently (i.e. with changing meanings) and the consequences of doing this. (We do not need to be given some philosopher’s criterion for synonymy. So we are not troubled by the impossibility of breaking out of Quine’s “circle of intensional words”. See “Two Dogmas of Empiricism”.)

Having learnt to apply tests, and having acquired
much skill in applying them over the years, we can go right ahead and say such things as: "The word ‘red’ refers to the hue of that object over there", or “The English word ‘red’ means the same as the German word ‘rot’", without offering any further explanation. We learn to say and understand things like “I said that he had taken the money, but I did not mean that he was a thief. You obviously misunderstood me.” In using each familiar language about meaning and referring and translating, we presuppose the answers to many questions about identity of meaning and make use of very general facts about language and words and sentences. So in order to state answers to those questions, we must make explicit the general knowledge which is presupposed and used in this way, and this involves making explicit some of the things we learn when we learn to talk.

2.A.4. By explaining how we ordinarily tell whether two sentences are taken to express the same proposition, or whether two persons take the same proposition to be expressed by some sentence, and so on, we remove much of the obscurity which is involved in talking about meanings and propositions. People sometimes object to talk about propositions (and other intensional entities, such as properties) because they do not wish to populate the world with such mysterious things. But meanings and propositions are not mysterious, if adequate criteria of identity are available, and they do not “populate the world” in the sense in which material objects do, any more than directions or numbers do. We can talk about the number of things in a class of material objects without mystery, and straight lines can have directions, because there are tests for identity of directions and
numbers.

It may be objected that there are no universally acceptable criteria for identity of propositions. But are there universally applicable and acceptable criteria for identity of physical objects, or shadows, or events, or persons? (Think of the paradox of the twice-mended axe, or paradoxes connected with immortality and re-incarnation.) In general, the suitability of criteria for identity depends on our purposes in identifying, and, if purposes vary, then what counts as adequate criteria of identity may vary. What counts as “the same colour” for the purposes of the editor of a cheap glossy magazine may not count as “the same colour” for the purposes of an artist or a fashion expert. What counts as “the same length” for a civil engineer may not do for the physicist, or the mechanical engineer.

Almost any set of criteria may be shown to break down in some conceivable situation or other. That is, criteria may come into conflict with one another, or may yield no answer, or an unsatisfactory answer to the question “Are they the same?” That, however, need not make us say that the things which these criteria serve to identify do not exist, or that they are in any way mysterious entities. Material objects, colours, shadows and lengths all exist. But some sets of criteria are more stable and widely accepted, because they are more useful, than other sets of criteria. Criteria for identifying material objects are simply of more general applicability than criteria for identifying propositions, or meanings, or shadows.

2.A.5. It is a matter of fact that there are ordinarily
accepted criteria for identifying propositions and meanings, on which we rely when we talk about ambiguities or the correctness of translations. But they are not infallible: some kinds of ambiguities and misunderstanding are very difficult to discover and to eliminate (see note at end of 2.B). In addition, it should be noted that, as remarked above, which criteria are employed may depend on the purposes for which judgements of identity are made. This may be illustrated by fluctuations in the criteria ordinarily adopted for eliminating ambiguities.

Thus, if one is interested only in testing for and eliminating flagrant ambiguities, the kinds which matter for purposes of ordinary conversation about the weather, about one’s latest illness, or about Mrs Jones’ son who insists on bringing tadpoles into the house, then one may employ fairly loose criteria. Conversations on such topics may usually be reported in a wide variety of ways without the charge of misrepresentation being incurred.

On the other hand, if one is discussing the weather, in an airport control-tower, or if one is a doctor recommending a patient for treatment, or a zoologist writing about the breeding habits of frogs, one may have to be more careful about what one means: one must look not only for obvious ambiguities, but for more subtle ones too. Someone reporting what is said in such cases has to be more careful about the words which he uses. Here stricter criteria of identity for meanings are employed, not necessarily because the words used are different, but because the purposes served by their utterance are different. When engaged in logical enquiries, one may use still stricter criteria for identity: a logician may regard two propositions as different if he wishes to
investigate the logical relation between them, such as mutual entailment, although even a careful scientist would regard them as one proposition.

We shall find (in Section 2.C) that the only way to avoid begging questions by ignoring subtle ambiguities is to use the strictest possible criteria for identity of meanings. This means that we shall have to be more careful than most logicians have been, and look for ambiguities even where they would be quite unimportant for most philosophical or non-philosophical purposes. Our motto will have to be the following remark made by Kant while discussing the role in philosophy of appeals to common ideas (in the introduction to “Prolegomena”): “Chisels and hammers may suffice to work a piece of wood, but for steel-engraving we require an engraver’s needle.” (Cf. 2.C.9.).

2.A.6. All this shows that we must not expect any very simple general answers to questions about meanings. There are various ways of comparing and distinguishing meanings, none of them intrinsically correct, each suitable for some purpose or other. But there is another complication, which arises out of the fact that tests for identifying meanings operate at several different levels. This will come out in the next section, where I shall discuss some of the general presuppositions of statements about meanings.

2.B. General facts about language

2.B.1. So far I have merely said that it is important to be clear as to what we mean by talking about “the same meaning”, or “the same proposition”, if we are to be clear
about applying the analytic-synthetic distinction and related distinctions. A thorough treatment of the subject would require a detailed investigation of what goes on when children learn to speak, when a child or adult learns a foreign language, or when we look for and find ambiguities in our own familiar language. This is the only way to answer all the questions raised in the previous section. There is no room for such a detailed investigation here, so, in this section I shall try only to indicate some of the sorts of things which would probably come out of it, by making a few rather vague generalizations.

2.B.2. First of all, it will turn out that even in employing simple tests for discovering the meanings with which ordinary descriptive words are employed, we make use of very general presuppositions about language and linguistic activities. For example, knowing how to tell whether two persons mean the same by some word or sentence presupposes a knowledge of what kind of thing a language or linguistic utterance is. For otherwise we should not be able to tell whether the noises people were making, or the things they were “writing” were part of a game, or a religious ritual, for example. This is not a trivial problem of identification, .to be solved by looking to see what the marks they write down look like, or listening to the sound of the noises they produce, since it is quite possible for the same marks or noises to be produced as moves in a complicated game, even where making such a move is not using a language. Without presupposing an answer to the question whether a person is using a language, we cannot find out what he means by what he says. It follows that there must be some means of identifying kinds of
linguistic behaviour as such, and these methods must be learnt, at least implicitly, by a child when it learns to talk, and applied, explicitly or implicitly, by anthropologists when they first decide that the grunts and clicks and other noises produced by the members of some newly-discovered tribe are linguistic utterances.

2.B.3. This is not all. Not only must we know what it is for behaviour to be linguistic behaviour, in addition we must know what sorts of things various kinds of linguistic activities are, if we wish to talk about the meanings of words and sentences. We must, for example, know what it is to make a statement, and how this differs from asking a question, giving a command, exclaiming, or expressing jubilation, and so on. Knowing what statements, questions, commands, etc., are cannot be simply a matter of knowing the appropriate forms of words, for trying to teach someone what a statement is, is not just a matter of teaching him which form of words are called "statement-making sentences". We have to teach him what can be done with these forms of words. We must know how to tell whether he is doing the right sorts of things with them or not. Hence, being a statement, a command, a question, etc., cannot be merely a matter of having certain syntactical properties. It is a matter of being correlated somehow with certain purposes and activities.

There are rules for the correct use of various forms of sentences, and they differ from language to language. So the important thing in common between statements in one language and statements in another, which they do not share with questions in either, cannot be a type of form of words, but rather a type of use to which such a form may be put, for example. Knowing what this use is
involves knowing what it is for a statement to give information, to be true or false, to be believed or disbelieved, to be contradicted or agreed with. Knowing what a command is, involves knowing what it is to want to get something done. It also involves knowing what it is for a command to be obeyed or disobeyed. Perhaps it involves knowing what it is to have authority. Such things, and many more, must be learnt when we learn to speak.

All this knowledge is presupposed even by simple statements about the meanings of simple words, since we cannot understand what a descriptive word like “smooth” means without knowing what it would be for that word to be used with that meaning in a statement, or a command - such as, “Bring me the smooth block of wood”. We have therefore found two different levels at which tests are required for identifying: meanings:

I. There must be criteria for identifying activities as linguistic.

II. There must be tests for identifying and distinguishing different kinds of linguistic activity.

(We could put this by saying: I. we must know what sort of thing a language is, and II, we must know what sorts of things various kinds of linguistic utterances are, if we wish to talk about meanings.)

2.B.4. It is time now to be a little more specific. Knowing what it is for a statement to be true involves knowing what sorts of things a statement can be about, and how the words in the statement determine which particular things are referred to in the statement and what is said about them. What sorts of things a statement can be about will depend on the particular language in
question, and different statements in the same language may be about quite different sorts of things. Compare a statement about the weather in Oxford, a statement about a mathematical theorem, and a statement about the morally best course of action in some situation.

But even if we restrict ourselves to the class of statements to be discussed later, which may vaguely be characterized as being “about the perceptible world”, we may find that in some languages a greater variety of things may be said than in others. Or different languages may involve quite different ways of looking at the world, or, what comes to the same thing almost, quite different ways of talking about it. In particular, they may employ quite different conceptual schemes. Thus, one language may treat the world as consisting of arrangements of enduring physical objects, as English does, and permit the making of statements which say things about the qualities or properties of such objects, or their mutual relations, or the changes in such properties and relations, whereas another language does not use the concept of an enduring physical object, permitting only statements to the effect that the speaker is aware of certain features (hardness, roundness, furriness, and so on) in his environment.

Unless we are sure that two persons do not use languages which differ in this way, unless we are sure that they employ the same sort of conceptual scheme, we cannot be sure that they mean the same by the statements they make, even if their statements would be true in the same situations. For when statements employ different conceptual schemes, there may be no way of translating one into the other, or there may be several different systems of translation, all equally satisfactory or equally
unsatisfactory, there being no question of one translation being better than others. In such a case, there can be no clear sense to the question whether two persons who use these different conceptual schemes, mean the same by the words or sentences they utter. We can give it a sense by selecting criteria for identity of meaning, but in doing this we alter the sense of the words "mean the same".

To sum up: knowing how any particular language works involves knowing what sorts of conceptual schemes it employs, and questions about identity of meaning presuppose identity of conceptual schemes. So:

III. There must be tests for identity of conceptual schemes.

2.B.5. As I am not trying to give a detailed account of all the criteria for identity of meanings and propositions, I shall not explain how we compare and distinguish conceptual schemes, but will take it for granted that we can, which is not unreasonable, since we can and do successfully compare and distinguish the meanings with which various persons use their words. For example, we are reasonably sure about the translation of "red" into German. This shows that Quine must be mistaken in his assertion that we can never discover with certainty that one conceptual scheme rather than another is employed by some person or group of persons. (See "Word and Object", sections 12, 15, 16, etc.) He must be wrong in any case, for unless we had some method of identifying conceptual schemes, we could not have learnt to understand the words with which he describes the various conceptual schemes, which he says we cannot distinguish! The method of making such distinctions must be embodied in the way in which we
learn to use words like “property”, “unobserved”, “the same” (applied to persisting material objects at different times), and so on. (We may have to rely on our shared natural reactions to some extent.)

If we had no inkling of the kind of conceptual scheme employed by certain people, then we could not ask or answer questions about the meanings of individual words or sentences in their language: indeed, we could not even be sure that it was a language. We could, at most, learn, by empirical observation, the conditions in which they produced certain noises, the situations in which they gave the appearance of “assenting” to statements, and perhaps some idea of the causal connections between their noise-producing habits and the smooth running of their society. But to know all this is not to understand. We could not say that we had understood them until we knew to what aspects of their environment they were referring, or whether they were referring to anything at all, when they produced their noises as predicted. (Cf. 1.B.6 above).

2.B.6. So, on the assumption that we can compare and distinguish conceptual schemes, I shall restrict the discussion to a language which is like our own in allowing talk about particulars and universals. Particulars are material objects, events, persons and other things which are spatio-temporally located. Universals are the properties which may be possessed and shared by these particulars, and the relations in which they may stand to one another. (I shall talk only about observable properties and relations.) So knowing how a language of this sort works, involves knowing what sorts of things material objects and other particulars are, and what sorts of things their properties and relations are. It involves
knowing how words and combinations of words may be correlated with such things and combined, perhaps with other words, to form sentences which can be understood as making statements, asking questions, and so on. The assumption that there are observable properties and relations, to which words can refer, does not seem to be a very implausible assumption. The next section but one (2.D) will be devoted to an explanation of what the assumption means, and what justifies it. At present I shall say only that knowing what sort of thing a property is, involves knowing what it would be like for that property to occur in other objects than the ones in which it does in fact occur. Universals are not essentially tied to those particular objects which happen to instantiate them, and one who does not see this has not fully mastered the conceptual scheme about which I am talking. Much will be made of this in the sequel (Cf. 2.B.9, 3.C.4, 3.E.5, and Chapter seven). (Very little will be said about particulars, for reasons explained in Appendix I.)

It should be noted that a language may be over-determined as regards its conceptual schemes; for example, our language say have some other conceptual scheme built into it in addition to the one which I have described. If so, then there are two or more quite different ways in which we are able to look at the world or talk about it. Perhaps, for example, in addition to seeing it as made up of things and their properties, we can see it as made up of facts, or instantaneous events, etc. But we shall ignore such complications and problems, and concentrate only on (a) the fact that identification of meanings of words which can occur in statements about
the world presupposes the identification of conceptual schemes, and (b) the fact that we have at least the conceptual scheme which allows the existence of material objects and their observable properties and relations. These are the only particulars and universals I shall mention.

2.B.7. We have seen that in order to find out what a person means by his words and statements we must find out what sort (or sorts) of conceptual scheme he employs, or what sorts of entities he thinks of as making up the world and how. In addition, we must understand how he thinks of words as making up his sentences. For there will not only be words which refer to the entities for which there is room in his scheme (e.g. words referring to particular material objects, or descriptive words which refer to properties), but also other kinds of words and types of logical and grammatical constructions which help to determine what sort of statement is being made about the things referred to. Examples are: the word “is” in “My pencil is round”, and the structure which this statement shares with “Tom’s hat is brown”. Neither the word nor the structure refers to any material object or a property or relation, or anything else which might be described as an observable entity, an object of experience. But they help to determine the meanings of sentences, and so we must know how they work if we are to understand statements which employ them.

For example, we must understand the difference between subjects and predicates if we are fully to understand the statements quoted above. It is also necessary for an understanding of the difference in meaning between “round” and “roundness”, which do have different meanings
despite the fact that they refer to the same property, owing to the fact that they have different roles in the language. There might have been a language in which the same word was capable of occurring in both sorts of contexts, the difference in role being indicated by something other than a difference in the word. In that case it would not have quite the same meaning as either “round” or “roundness”. (Think of our word “red”.)

In order fully to know the meaning of a word it is not enough to know what things it refers to; one must know also what kind of word it is meant to be, and how it can be combined with other words to form sentences of various kinds. So when we compare and distinguish the meanings of individual words we take for granted a whole system of logical and grammatical constructions, and if we are to be able to identify the meanings of statements we must know what sorts of logical systems are employed, and what the functions are of individual logical words and constructions. In Chapter five I shall discuss the ways in which these “logical constants” help to determine the meanings of sentences in which they occur, by determining the conditions in which statements are true, commands are obeyed or disobeyed, and so on.

2.B.8. From all this we can see that giving a full account of tests for identity of meanings and propositions would involve describing a great many different sorts of criteria, operating at many different levels, and also criteria for distinguishing things at the same level. To sum up: there must be (I) tests for telling whether certain behaviour should be described as linguistic, (II) tests for identifying and comparing various kinds of linguistic activity (statement making, questioning,
commanding, etc.), (III) tests for identifying various kinds of conceptual schemes, (IV) tests for identifying various kinds of logical and grammatical functions of words and constructions, and (V) tests for identifying and distinguishing (if the language is like English) the particular material objects or properties or relations to which individual words may refer.

Our knowledge of how to apply all these tests is presupposed not only when we talk about words and their meanings, but also when we use words, in thinking or talking. For we cannot use words without knowing what are mean, and this involves knowing, for example, what it would be like to mean the same or something different at another time, or to be understood or misunderstood by other persons. This requires some knowledge of how to apply criteria of identity. Moreover, the existence of criteria at all the levels described above is presupposed, even when we use familiar “low-level” words, as pointed out at the end of 2.B.3. (All this is very much oversimplified. Some qualifications are made in a note at the end of the section.)

2.B.9. To give a detailed account of the criteria required for identifying meanings at all these levels would be a very complicated and lengthy task. I shall take most of the answers for granted, concentrating explicitly only on those aspects of meaning which are directly relevant to my main problem, the problem of clarifying and justifying the assertion of the existence of synthetic necessary truths. Thus, several restrictions will be imposed on the discussion.

I shall not, for example, try to say how we recognize linguistic behaviour as such.
Neither shall I try to describe the differences between statements, commands, questions, exclamations and other kinds of linguistic utterances, but will concentrate only on statements, with the further restriction to statements containing only logical constants and descriptive expressions referring to properties or relations. (Cf. 1.C.2, above.) This eliminates the need to discuss aspects of meaning which are not concerned with the conditions in which statements are true or false. For example, we need not discuss the conditions in which it is appropriate to say "I advice you to leave home" rather than "Please leave home", or "If you leave home you will be happy". I use the notion of an appropriateness-condition to cover a wide variety of cases, including the conditions in which it is appropriate to say "Ouch!" or "Alas!" or "Why?", or the conditions in which it is appropriate to use statement-forms of sentence rather than question-forms, and so on. The identification of appropriateness-conditions presupposes not only the identification of conceptual schemes and logical systems (see III, and IV, above) but also the identification of certain kinds of social institutions and "forms of life". (Note, for example, how the use of expressions such as "I advise ..", "You may ...", "Please ...", "You ought ...", etc., presupposes the existence of ways of life. Words whose use presupposes the existence of social institutions and patterns of social behaviour may, of course, be relevant to determining the truth-conditions of statements in which they occur. The statement that someone made a promise, or gave advice, or asked a question, may be true or false.) The rules determining appropriateness-conditions for the utterance of various forms of expression (e.g., questions
or commands) may generate some so-called “pragmatic” implications, such as the “implication” from “P is the case”, or “I assert that P is the case”, to “I believe that P is the case”. I shall not go into this sort of question, but it might be relevant when attempts are made to generalize my account of the analytic-synthetic distinction. (See Chapter six).

There is far more to meanings of words and statements and other utterances than can be taken account of by considering truth-conditions (see 5.A.11, for example), but these other sorts of meanings can be ignored in a discussion of analyticity or necessity, for this is a matter of ways of being true or false.

In the next two chapters, three and four, I shall discuss ways of identifying those aspects of the meanings of descriptive words and expressions which help to determine truth-conditions of statements in which they occur. Then I shall proceed to discuss the ways in which logical words and constructions determine truth-conditions. (Nothing will be said about proper names and other expressions referring to particulars, for reasons given in appendix I.) All this will prepare the way for a discussion of statements which are true in all conditions.

First, however, I shall try, in the remaining sections of this chapter, to explain my we have to take account of the existence of universals (observable properties and relations) and then to explain what their existence amounts to.

Note on section 2.B

In this section I have made many oversimplifying assumptions, and now I should like to suggest a few qualifications to my remarks. I asserted that in order to
understand talk about meanings of words, or even in order to be able to use words with definite meanings, we presuppose a large amount of general knowledge about language, and, in particular, rely on the existence of criteria for identity at various levels. It must not be thought, however, that all this knowledge is explicit, that we should be able to formulate it or describe the criteria for identity which we presuppose. There is much that we can do without being able to say how we do it. (See Appendix III on “Implicit Knowledge”.)

Secondly, it should not be assumed that all the criteria for identity to which I have referred are commonly applied, even when we are explicitly talking about meanings. We take a great deal for granted in our dealings with other persons (and ourselves). If I want to teach someone how to ask a question in French, I may simply assume that he knows what questions are, and say: “This form of words and symbols is used for asking questions”. Similarly, when I am not sure whether someone is asking a question or making a statement, I do not apply direct criteria, usually, but simply assume that he knows how to apply them, and ask: “Are you asking me or telling me?” In fact, we hardly ever apply criteria for identity at the higher levels, since the things we take for granted do not often lead us into trouble, owing to great regularities in human behaviour: we cross our bridges only when we come to them, and we don’t often come to them. Nevertheless, it seems that it makes sense to talk about meanings only because it is possible to test our assumptions by applying criteria, even at the highest levels. (But they are not infallible. See 2.A.5.)

Finally, many of my remarks must be modified in
order to apply to a person whose linguistic training is incomplete, owing either to an unfortunate environment and bad teaching, or to his own constitutional inability to pick up concepts, or his young age. Children who cannot yet form sentences and make statements on their own initiative may be able to respond with correct answers to questions like "Is this red?" or "Is this round?", saying "Yes" or "No". But nothing very definite is likely to come out if we apply tests to find out exactly how they understand the question (e.g. in the sense of "Is this object red?" or "Is redness here?"). Their conceptual schemes may be still too underdeveloped. The process of development and elimination of indefiniteness continues even in later life. (See 4.B.4, below.)

2.C. **Universals and strict criteria**

2.C.1. I have stated that all mystery can be removed from talk about meanings and propositions by making criteria for identity of meanings explicit. (In 2.A.) I went on to describe some general presupposition of talk about meanings, showing how criteria for identity had to apply at several different levels. In particular, the identification of meanings of individual words presupposes the identification of some conceptual scheme. In this section, taking for granted the existence of a conceptual scheme in which words may refer to universals or particulars (cf. 2.B.6, above), I shall try to show how observable properties and relations (i.e., universals) can provide sharp criteria for identity of meanings of descriptive words, at least from the point of view of a person who uses such words. Unless we use sharp criteria for identity of meanings we are likely to find ourselves confusing issues and begging questions when we try to
apply the analytic-synthetic distinction. This will be illustrated with the aid of some controversial examples, about which more will be said in Chapter seven. These and other examples help to demonstrate that criteria for identity of meaning which are normally employed are too loose for our purposes. (It may be recalled that there are no “correct” sets of criteria: their adequacy depends on the purposes for which they are chosen. (2.A.5)).

Many complications in our ordinary language will be ignored, at present, attempts being made in chapters three and four to remedy this deficiency.

2.C.2. What are we to make of the statement that two descriptive words mean the same, or are taken to have the same meaning, by some person or group of persons? How are we to answer questions about synonymy? Philosophers are sometimes inclined to deal with such questions not by looking to see how we in fact decide whether to say that two words or two sentences mean the same or not, but by proposing neat tests, like “substitutability salva veritate”. In search of a slogan they ignore our everyday practice. When they have found that their slogans will not work, they give up, demanding that the notion of synonymy be rejected, or they turn to nominalism, or some such thing. Of course we do not and need not decide whether we mean the same by two words by substituting one for another in all possible sentences and seeing whether the truth-value of the statement expressed is changed by the substitution. How could we possibly apply such a test? How could we know that the truth-value would or would not be changed unless we knew whether the words had the same meanings?

Surely in order to settle questions about the meanings
of words we cannot merely talk about relations between words and sentences, without ever mentioning the things to which those words refer? I shall try to show that talking about the properties to which words are understood to refer may help to explain talk about synonymy of descriptive words.

2.C.3. Let us look at some ordinary ways of eliminating ambiguities. If it is possible for a sequence of sounds or marks produced by some person to be taken as either a sentence in English or a sentence in French, then we can find out which of two possible meanings he intends his utterance to have by asking which of the two languages he was intending to speak. But this may still leave some questions unanswered, for ambiguities may persist within a language.

In some cases, remaining ambiguities may be eliminated by simple re-interpretation, by saying in other less ambiguous words precisely what was meant. Thus we may ask: “When you said ‘I saw three tadpoles yesterday’ did you mean you saw three of the army’s new amphibious craft, or were you talking about animals which are the larvae of frogs?” Alternatively, it may be possible to eliminate the ambiguity by pointing to objects which the words are supposed to describe. For example, by pointing to frog-larvae and saying “I was talking about those things”, one may enable others to identify one’s meaning. But this eliminates only flagrant ambiguities. There may be remaining ambiguities which are more subtle, as is brought out by the question: “Did you intend the word ‘tadpole’ to mean ‘animals with this shape colour and habitat’, or did you intend it to mean ‘animals which are the larvae of frogs’, or did you mean the conjunction of the two?”
In most cases, there will be no definite answer to this question, and for normal purposes it does not matter (for reasons which will be explained below, and in Chapter four), but it may matter for our purposes, for example if we want to know whether the statement “All tadpoles are frog-larvae” is analytic or synthetic.

2.C.4. Normally the difference between “I saw three frog-larvae” and “I saw three of the army’s new amphibious craft” is important because it is very likely that when one is true the other is false. Similarly, the difference between the corresponding two senses of the word “tadpole” will be important because it makes a difference to whether a particular object is correctly described by that word or not. But the difference between “I saw three frog-larvae” and “I saw three animals with the shape colour and habitat of tadpoles” does not matter for ordinary purposes since it is true (or let us so assume for the sake of illustration), and generally believed, that whenever one of these statements would be true the other would be true too. The assertion of either would enable the hearer to know what had been seen by the speaker. So, to report “I saw three tadpoles” as “He said he saw three frog-larvae” is to report accurately enough for normal purposes, and it would be equally accurate to say “He said he saw three animals of such and such an appearance and habitat.” In other words, we are often quite content to use extensional criteria for identity of meanings of descriptive words: where it can be taken for granted and is true that the same objects are correctly describable by two words, then, for many normal purposes, those words are synonymous. There is often no point in distinguishing their meanings, or in objecting to reports such as the
first one above, by saying: “You are misrepresenting me, as I merely intended to say I saw three animals with a certain appearance, without implying anything about their parentage”. Such an objection would often provoke complete bafflement.

This helps to explain way Malcolm wrote (in Mind, 1940, p.339, et.seq.) that if two persons would take the same states of affairs as verifying what they take to be expressed by certain sentences, then we should say that they understand the same thing by those sentences, that they take them to express the same proposition. It also gives some support for Frege’s decision to take identity in extension as a criterion for identity of concepts: “... coincidence in extension is a necessary and sufficient criterion for the occurrence between concepts of the relation corresponding to identity between objects.” (See “Translations”, p.80.)

2.C.5. Despite all this, identity in extension is not a universally acceptable criterion for identity of meanings. For it is possible that there might be an object which had the appearance and habitat of a tadpole which was not in fact the larva of a frog, and such an object, if it existed, would be describable by the word “tadpole” in one of the two senses explained above, but not in the other. So although there would not normally be a point in making the objection mentioned above to the report of the statement “I saw three tadpoles”, there would be an objection if the speaker thought that this possibility should be taken seriously, and did not want to assume that animals were frog-larvae just because they had certain recognizable features. So the mere possibility of a state of affairs
in which with one sense a sentence would express a falsehood while with the other sense it expressed a truth can count against the identification of the two senses, for some purposes, despite the fact that the possibility is not actually realized. We acknowledge this when we ask the question "What would you have said if such and such had been the case?" in order to discover exactly what a person means by some word or sentence. So extensional criteria of identity may be too loose to pick out relatively subtle ambiguities of a kind which do not matter for ordinary purposes, but might matter. We apply a sharper criterion when we talk about possibilities.

2.C.6. But how do we apply the sharper criterion? How do we tell that there might have been an animal with the characteristic appearance of a tadpole which was not the larva of a frog? How do we perform the activity of considering possibilities? The only possible states of affairs which we can observe and examine in order to find out which statements would be true and which false if they were actual states of affairs are those which are actual states of affairs. We cannot perceive the set of all possible worlds, we can perceive only the actual one. So when we decide that two meanings of a word or sentence should be distinguished on account of the possibility of its making a difference to whether the word correctly describes something or whether the statement is true or false, possibilities cannot be the fundamental explanation of our decision. I shall argue in Chapter seven that it is by paying attention to observable properties that we are able to think and talk about unactualized possibilities. Although in fact the extension of the word "W" is the same whether it has the
meaning \( m_1 \), or the meaning \( m_2 \) we can tell nevertheless that it is possible for "W" correctly to describe an object when it has one meaning while it does not describe it when it has the other meaning, because the word refers to different properties when it has these different meanings, and the properties may "come apart". We can examine the characteristic appearance of a tadpole to see if there is anything involved in the possession of this property (i.e., the appearance) which necessitates being the off-spring of frogs, and find that there is not: the properties may come apart, an animal could have one property without the other. So we are able to distinguish two (or more) possible meanings of "tadpole", even though there would usually be no point in distinguishing them, for normal non-philosophical purposes.

2.C.7. It might be thought that we could avoid talking about the properties to which descriptive words are intended to refer, if we concentrated our attention instead on the process in which people learn to use those words. Then we might discover whether two persons meant the same by "tadpole" or not, by finding out whether they had learnt its use in the same way. But this is open to two objections. First of all, it would be a difficult test to apply, since the process in which we learn to speak is very gradual and extended, and subject to an enormous amount of possible variation. This means that it would not be easy to say what counted as "learning in the same way", or to discover whether two persons had learnt some word in the same way. Secondly, even if two persons are given exactly the same instructions, they may understand them differently. Two children may both be shown tadpoles and told that they
are produced by frogs and will, if they survive, themselves grow into frogs. One may take this as merely an additional fact about those animals which are describable as “tadpoles”, while the other regards it as a necessary condition for being correctly so describable. The latter regards being a frog-larva as part of what is meant by being a tadpole, the former does not. The facts being what they are, this difference in the way they understand may never happen to come out (though it could do so).

So even a careful examination of the teaching process may fail to reveal subtle ambiguities, unless we take into account what goes on in the pupil’s mind, and this means asking which properties he takes the word to refer to, or which properties were drawn to his attention by the teaching process.

2.C.8. But there is another more important reason why we must look to properties rather than mere possibilities for a criterion for identity of meanings of descriptive words. Suppose the word “tetrahedral” to mean “solid figure bounded by planes and having four vertices”, while the word “tetralateral” means “bounded by four plane surfaces”. Since it is impossible for a plane-sided object to have four vertices without being a plane-sided object with four faces and vice versa, it is impossible for either of the following statements to be true unless the other is (in the same circumstances): namely (1) “The paperweight on the table is tetrahedral” and (2) “The paperweight on the table is tetralateral”.

Despite this equivalence, it seems intelligible to say that they are different statements, that they have different meanings, since the words “tetrahedral” and
“tetralateral” refer to different properties. (In the terminology of Chapter three, their meanings are “synthesized” differently.) It is possible to notice, attend to, have in mind, think about, or recognize one of these properties without being aware of the existence of the other - so why can one not intend a word to refer to one of them and not the other? After all, if to understand what a person means by describing something as “tetrahedral” is to know what it would be like to do so for the same reason as he does (Cf. 1.B.6 and 3.C.5), then we shall not have understood if he intends the word to refer to the property of having four vertices, etc., and we think it refers to the other property, despite the impossibility of there being any object which is correctly described by the word in one sense and not in the other.

This brings out another reason why the teaching process cannot serve infallibly as a criterion for identity of meaning, for once again the same method of teaching may give two different pupils two different concepts, if one of them happens to notice one aspect of the illustrative examples, while the other notices another aspect. And here it is even less likely that the ambiguity will be detected than in the case of “tadpole” - though it is also less likely that it will matter, for most normal purposes.

This example shows also that yet another criterion for identity of statements will not always do, though it is sometimes appealed to, namely that two sentences express the same statement if the statement made by each of them entails the statement made by the other, or if each entails and is entailed by the same statements as the other. This is too loose because it would fail to distinguish the statements (1) and (2) above, since, owing to the
impossibility that either of them is false while the other is true, each entails the other.

2.C.9. Now it may be objected that there is a good reason for saying that the words “tetrahedral” and “tetralateral” refer to one and the same property, since they are *analytically* equivalent, in a sense to be explained below. This may be so, but it should not be taken as *obvious* that there is no point in distinguishing the meanings of the words, or the properties to which they refer, especially when we are discussing the question whether there are any necessary connections which are not analytic. If we wish to take this question seriously, we must be prepared to distinguish meanings where for most other purposes meanings do not need to be distinguished, and this means looking for the sharpest possible criteria for identity of meanings. (We must use Kant’s engraver’s needle. Cf. 2.A.5.) For otherwise we shall be in danger of begging questions.

If we do not distinguish meanings as finely as possible, we may fail to separate two propositions, or two concepts, thinking there is only one. Hence we may fail to notice the relation between these propositions, or concepts, and say simply overlook a possible candidate for the title of “synthetic necessary connection”, or we may fail to distinguish some necessarily true proposition which is analytic from one which is synthetic, if there are such things. In this way we settle the question at issue merely by selecting such criteria for identity of meanings as ensure that analytic connections between meanings cannot be distinguished from necessary ones and that no proposition can be necessarily true without
being identical with an analytic one. In order to avoid this question-begging procedure we must look for the sharpest possible criteria. Only then can we hope to understand what people mean, or think they mean, when they assert that there are synthetic necessary truths. It seems very likely that the apparently irresolvable disagreement amongst philosophers on this topic can be traced to a failure to make explicit the sets of criteria for identity which are implicitly used, so that one lot uses sharp criteria while the others use looser ones, and arguments proceed at cross purposes, without any hope of agreement. I do not wish to imply that any one set of criteria is correct. (See section 2.A.) It all depends on the purposes for which they are chosen. But for the purposes of this discussion we must, for the time being, use what seem to be the sharpest criteria for identity of meanings, and say that "tetrahedral" and "tetralateral" have different meanings, for the reasons given in 2.C.8.

2.C.10. We shall therefore reject as superficial and question-begging, arguments such as the following: "It is analytic that every figure bounded by three straight lines has exactly three vertices, for the concept of a triangle can be defined either in terms of being bounded by three sides, or in terms of having three angles. So the statement 'Every figure bounded by three straight sides has exactly three vertices' is the same as the statement 'Every triangle has exactly three vertices', which is analytic, by definition of 'triangle'. Q.E.D."

(Cf. 3.C.10.)

I have put the argument in a very crude form, but
it can appear in more subtle guise. (see 7.C.6.) The essential thing to note in it is the use of the phrase “can be defined ...” with the implication that one and the same word can be given its meaning in more than one way. This is not uncommon usage in mathematics (see, for example, how many different “definitions” mathematicians may use of the property of being a conic section), but it presupposes the use of relatively loose criteria for identity of meanings, too loose for our purposes. For we are not concerned with whether words can be so defined as to make certain statements analytic, but whether they have to be. We wish to ask whether they can be distinguished, as having different meanings, and yet be necessarily connected.

2.C.11. All this should be recalled if it appears that some of the techniques employed in later chapters for describing and distinguishing meanings are too nice and artificial. We cannot avoid them, if we are to use the sharpest possible criteria for identity of meanings of descriptive words.

We have seen that various more or less familiar tests for identity of meaning are not sufficiently stringent, for our purposes, such as comparing extensions, comparing methods of instruction, and so on. I have suggested that stricter tests are possible if we ask always to which properties descriptive words are taken to refer. We shall see, in Chapter four, that there are sometimes no answers to such questions: our ordinary statements are not made with sufficiently definite meanings. This will have the consequence that it is not possible to apply the analytic-synthetic distinction to all ordinary
statements, but that need not trouble us, so long as it can be applied in some cases, at least in principle.

It may be objected that talk about properties and other universals does not help, because they cannot be used to explain anything, since they do not exist as “complete and independent entities” (see Price, “Thinking and Experience”), and in any case their existence depends on the existence of words with meanings, so they cannot be used to identify and distinguish meanings, without circularity. I shall try to answer this in the next section, by showing how, at least from one point of view (cf. 1.B.2), the existence of universals is independent of language, and so may be used to explain our use of descriptive words. The sense in which it explains will become clearer in Chapter three.

2.D. The independence of universals

2.D.1. Meanings, concepts and propositions are not things which exist in their own right as objects of experience, for we cannot see them, hear them, feel them, or in any other way perceive their existence. We might say that talk about meanings, concepts or propositions is a sort of circumlocution for talk about entities of other kinds, such as particulars referred to by proper names, or properties, qualities or relations referred to by descriptive words, the types of situations and verbal contexts in which the use of a word is appropriate, the purposes with which sentences are uttered, and so on. In short: talk about meanings, etc., is a circumlocution for talk about the things which we examine in applying criteria for identity of meanings.
On the other hand, universals, that is observable properties and relations, do exist in their own right as objects of experience, for they can be seen, attended to, thought about, imagined or referred to, without the mediation of any other kinds of things out of which they have to be “logically constructed”. That is why they can be said to explain our use of descriptive words. It is only because observable properties and relations exist that we can use descriptive words as we do, just as it is only because their referents exist that we can use proper names and other definite referring expressions as we do.

Not only the use of referring expressions, but also the use of descriptive words and expressions requires that conditions of existence and identifiability be satisfied. The mere fact that a word occurs in a predicate-position in an utterance does not guarantee that it has a meaning, that it predicates successfully. What more is required? In some cases at least, what is required is that there should be some property or combination of properties to which it refers. So, if universals are the things referred to by such words and expressions, then their existence cannot be reduced to the existence of words in a language, since their existence is presupposed by the use of those words. This will now be amplified.

2.D.2. Descriptive words may occur in sentences expressing statements, questions, commands, etc., and knowing their meanings involves knowing how they contribute to the meanings of these sentences. (See section 2.B.) A descriptive word contributes to the meaning of a statement, by helping to determine the conditions in which that statement would be true. The conditions in which
the statement would be true depend on the conditions in which particular objects are correctly describable by the word in question. So knowing in general how to tell whether statements including the word “P” are true or false requires the ability to tell whether simple statements of the form “That is a P” or “That is P” are true, for example, “That is a cube” or “That is red”. So understanding a descriptive word involves knowing how to tell which objects fall within its extension and which do not. How does one tell?

In general the answer is very complicated, as will be seen in the next two chapters, but in the simplest cases one tells whether an object is correctly describable by a word “P” by looking to see whether that object has a property which one has learnt to correlate with “P”, or not. (Here we have a sense in which the meaning of a word can determine an application “in advance”.) In many cases the examination is visual, but it needn’t be: consider how we tell whether an object is describable as “sticky” or “cool”.

I shall try to show that what determines the describability of particular objects by descriptive words and expressions may, at least in some cases, be correlations between words and recognizable properties. I call these semantic correlations, because they correlate words with non-linguistic entities. They may also be described as “semantic rules” since, in virtue of them, some descriptions are correct and some are incorrect. They are to be distinguished from what I shall describe as “purely verbal rules”, which merely correlate words with other words. By providing us with “assertion licences”, that is, by fixing the conditions in which assertions may be made truthfully, semantic correlations help to ensure that
concepts have boundaries, or rather that the extensions of concepts have boundaries, for they enable us to decide whether objects fall under those concepts or not. (I have been talking about observable properties, but similar remarks could be made about relations.)

2.D.3. There must be these correlations, or something similar, if words are to have meanings, if concepts are to have boundaries, if there is to be a difference between describing something correctly and describing it incorrectly. It may look as if we do not need anything more than correlations between words and other words, such as definitions of words in terms of other words, since we can sometimes teach the meaning of a word by giving a definition, or discover whether two persons mean the same by their words by asking them for definitions. But this assumes that the meanings of the words used in those definitions have been taught and understood. The process of defining words in terms of other words must start somewhere, with the setting up of correlations between words and other things. Words alone will not do. For example, to say that two words are to be incompatible descriptions, or synonyms, does not even begin to tell us which things are and which things are not describable by either of them unless the meaning of the other is already known. It seems that Hampshire overlooked this when he wrote: “In all cases, clarifying the use of a descriptive word or phrase is a process of drawing attention to its established links with other descriptions.” (In Philosophy 1950, p.243.)

Correlations between words and other words may, of course, enable us to decide that some statements are necessarily true and that others are necessarily false, and
they may license us to make inferences, or to substitute one expression for another in a true statement. (Cf. 4.C.3.) But they cannot, of their own accord, enable us to decide in which circumstances contingent statements are true or false. They may enable us to assert “Nothing is both round and square”, but they cannot tell us when we may say things like “There is a square piece of paper on my typewriter”. For such “assertion licences” we require not just rules relating words and words, but semantic rules correlating words and non-linguistic entities, such as properties. We need something more than mere verbal rules, and when we have the “something more”, it may turn out that we do not need correlations between words and words as well: Hampshire’s “links between descriptive expressions” may turn out to be superfluous.¹ (Cf. 2.D.4 & 3.B.4.c.)

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¹ I said that correlations between words and words may tell us which statements are necessarily true or necessarily false, though they cannot yield assertion-licences for contingent statements. But this needs qualification. For if there are only verbal rules, and no rules correlating words with non-linguistic entities, how can a statement be about anything? And if it is not about anything, how can it be a statement? How can it be true, or false? The mere fact that someone is uttering sounds according to rules which permit some sounds and not others does not guarantee that he is using a language, or that he is saying anything which is true or false, or which conveys any information. This shows that when philosophers talk about truth in connection with formal systems, or when they describe them as “languages”, they are just muddled and talking well-disguised nonsense. They are muddled, because, although formulae in such a system may represent certain aspects of statements for purposes of classification, they are not themselves statements, and cannot be true or false, for the symbols of a formal system cannot be used to make contingent statements about anything. (Some further remarks are made on this topic in Appendix II, and in section 5.A.)
2.D.4. In “Analytic/Synthetic I” (Analysis, Dec. 1949), Waismann pointed out that certain kinds of linguistic rules, namely explicit definitions, or what I call “verbal rules”, serve as “substitution licences”, which enable us to make inferences from one proposition to another (see pp. 33 and 37). Later on (in “Analytic/Synthetic II”, p. 31) he remarked that ostensive definitions do not serve as substitution licences. We may now point out that ostensive definitions are procedures for teaching the semantic rules which govern the use of descriptive words, and therefore, although they do not directly set up substitution licences, they do serve as assertion licences: that is, they help to determine whether contingent statements are true or false. But we may add also that, in some cases, when words have been correlated with properties it may turn out that two words or expressions are thereby rendered synonymous. For example, in virtue of the semantic correlations it may turn out that “gleen” is synonymous with “glossy and green”. In that case, even semantic rules, as taught ostensively, may, indirectly, provide us with substitution licences, or inference licences. (This is one of the ways in which Hampshire’s “links between descriptive expressions”, mentioned above, may turn out to be superfluous, once semantic correlations have been taken into account.)

2.D.5. All this may seem obvious and trivial. But it is not yet quite clear what my assertion that universals exist in their own right and can explain our use of descriptive words, comes to. The best way for me to clarify this further is to say where I disagree with other philosophers.
First there are those who say that the existence of properties is merely a matter of the existence of their instances. (It would be foolish to deny outright that there are properties, for we are all aware that there are shapes, colours, sizes, textures, kinds of feel, and so on.) This seems to me to be quite wrong, for, as remarked above (2.B.6.) properties are not essentially tied to their actual instances. For example, I can assert that a certain complicated shape is not the shape of my table, and in doing so I presuppose that there is such a shape, but I certainly do not presuppose that anything ever did have or will have that shape, since I know quite well which shape I mean without thinking about any particular object or objects with that shape. The existence of a property does not imply the existence of actual instances, only that it is possible for instances to exist. There may be many complicated shapes which never have been or will be instantiated, but they nevertheless exist. Perhaps there are colours which would be instantiated for the first time, if only someone would put the correct combination of chemicals together. Perhaps someone with a sufficiently good imagination can “think up” a colour which has hitherto not been instantiated, and even decide to associate a word with it.

Anyone who disagrees with me and thinks that the existence of properties involves the existence of particular instances, will, of course, deny that correlation with properties can explain the use of descriptive words, since such a word can be used, as remarked above, without presupposing that it refers to a property which is instantiated. Thus confusion about the sense in which universals exist can lead to confusion as to whether they explain.
2.D.5. (Note). Strawson seems to think that when we assert that a universal exists all we mean is to imply that it has instances,

"... as when one says, for example, that saintliness exists, or that there is such a thing as saintliness, and means by this the same as we mean by saying that there exist, or that there are, saintly people ..." ("Individuals", p. 241.)

I do not think we often do mean this sort of thing, any more than when one denies that there is such a thing as saintliness he means simply to deny that there are have been or will be saintly people. (To say "There is no such thing as X-ness" would normally be to imply that there couldn’t be anything which was an X.)

Strawson does, of course, allow that there is another sense in which existence may be ascribed to universals (p.239-241), but this is a purely formal sense, and seems to imply only that there are formal analogies between the word “saintliness” and other substantive words.

I want to say that even the use of “red” in contexts like “My notebook is red”, where it is not a substantive, presupposes the existence of a property, and does so in a “metaphysically charged” way (op. cit. p.239), since the existence of such a property is a fact about the world, which must usually be learnt through experience. It is a fact about the world because there might have been a world in which the property did not exist, a world in which nothing could be red. (It is clear from his remarks on pp. 183, 184, 185, 186, 193, 238, 239-241, that Strawson did not consider this way of looking at the existence of universals. Had he done so I cannot see how he could have tried to relate the grammatical subject-predicate distinction to the categorial particular-universal distinction, via a distinction between expressions
which do and expressions which do not presuppose facts about the world.)

2.D.6. This explains how I disagree with those who would reduce the existence of universals to the existence of their instances. Secondly, I disagree with philosophers who say that universals depend for their existence on language, or imply that we must know what a language is in order to know what universals are, or deny that universals can explain any aspects of our use of language. Usually, such philosophers really mean only to reject bad theories of universals, which oversimplify things. For example, they assume that universals can explain our use of words only if there is exactly one universal for every descriptive word, such as a single property common to all the objects describable by that word. But this “one-one” model leads people into grave difficulties, when they try to find some one thing common to all the objects describable by a word with a complicated meaning. [Their failure to find a common property leads them to say, for example, that universals are intangible to the senses, being apprehended only in thought (Cf. Lazerowitz in Mind 1946, p.1.), or that universals are “partial realizations of the specific forms, existing only as the thought of them” (Cf. Blanshard, “The Nature of Thought”, Vol.I, p.609). Or they may be led to say that universals cannot be sensed because things sensed are many and different where there is only one universal. (Cf. Austin, in P.A.S. Supp, 1939, p.85).]

However, when the intolerable implications of the “one-one” model lead philosophers to give up universals
altogether, they give up too much, for then they are left only with words and no way of explaining how words describe or have meanings. By taking into account complexities in our use of descriptive words, as in the next two chapters, we can preserve a theory of universals while rejecting the one-one model. (If we insist on looking for one property corresponding to every descriptive word, then some must be “improper” properties, constructed or synthesized out of other “proper” properties which are tangible to the senses. (Cf. 3.B.5.))

2.D.7. A stubborn insistence on the one-one model is not the only thing which accounts for the refusal to acknowledge the existence of universals as independent entities. Another is the fact that which properties a person sees in the world, and the way in which he classifies things as having something in common, may depend to some extent on the society in which he has been reared, and the classifications made in its language. (See, for example, Waismann, in "Verifiability", p.137-9, etc.) This may provide good reason for saying that the existence of a property is a fact about people not a fact about the world, but only if we take up a different point of view from the one adopted in this essay. (See Chapter one, section 1.B.). For from the point of view of a person who can see properties, they certainly exist in their own right, as things which he can perceive, attend to, recognize, bear in mind, etc., without having to think about people or language. What is more, from his point of view, or the point of view of a person who understands him, the existence of these properties which he can see explains how he classifies things and what he says about objects in his environment (as will be shown
in more detail in section 3.C.) This, however, leaves open the possibility of explaining his behaviour from some other point of view, such as a psychological or anthropological point of view, a possibility with which we are not concerned, since we are looking for rational explanations, not causal ones.

2.D.8. From the point of view of one who talks and can see properties, therefore, we must disagree with the attitudes underlying remarks made by philosophers to the effect that universals are somehow generated by language, or that their existence is to be explained by talking about language. Here are some examples:

(i) "To say that a property exists is to say that a general word has been or could be introduced, to characterize the things which possess it." (Quinton, in "Properties and Classes", P.A.S., 1957-8.)

(ii) "Saying what meaning a symbol has involves describing the relevant experiences, and this brings us back into the realm of symbols." (Ayer, in "Thinking and Meaning", p.27.)

(iii) "And in the end the kind of similarity which is meant can be specified only by a backward reference to the name". (Pears, in LL.II, p.56-7.)

(iv) "It is fatally easy to talk carelessly about things in a way which suggests that they stand out there already labelled in a way which indicates their properties .... One refers airily to THE TWO classes as if one could say WHICH TWO classes without using the words." (Pears, LL.II, p.116.)

(v) "The sense of a predicate expression (e.g. 'is a rose') generates its referent ('rosehood') if there is one. It could not fail to refer." (J. R. Searle, D. Phil, thesis, p.208.)
(vi) “The notion that an entity stands to a predicate as an object stands to a singular referring expression must be finally abandoned.” (Searle, p.188.) “Universals ... do not lie in the world” (p.192) and “... propositions asserting their existence are tautologies” (p.191). (See also Strawson's "individuals"; p.184: "But now we no longer have an empirical proposition, a fact about the world. We have a tautology ... It is a fact about language.")

Concerning (ii), (iii) and (iv), consider the following question: When I say what person or thing a proper name refers to, by using words, does this bring us back to the "realm of symbols"? Is this a "backward reference" to a name?

Concerning (v) and (vi), recall the muddles, e.g., about "substance" into which philosophers have been led by thinking that the existence of proper names and other referring expressions somehow suffices to guarantee the existence of the particulars referred to. (Cf. Wittgenstein, "Tractatus", 2.02 to 2.03, especially 2.0211 and 2.024.)

2.D.9. I have so far been labouring the point that if our words and sentences are to have any meaning, to be capable of being used to make statements which can be true or false, then there must be semantic rules correlating words with non-linguistic entities, and I have tried to show that universals, that is, observable properties and relations, are suitable non-linguistic entities. Not only are they non-linguistic, but their existence cannot be reduced to the existence of sets of objects which resemble one another, since a universal (such as a shape) can exist even though it has no instances.
This means that anyone who tries to explain our use of descriptive words such as "red", "round" or "smooth", in terms of actual particular objects or sets of particular objects whose existence is presupposed by the use of these words, has gone wrong somewhere. (Cf. A. Pap, in S.N.T., chapters 9 and 13. See also Körner, in “Conceptual Thinking”, where he talks about sets of “exemplars”). Properties are not essentially tied to actual instances, and can be thought about or referred to independently of their instances. (See circa 3.C.4 & 3.E.5.)

It may be objected that it is still not clear in what sense the existence of universals can explain our use of descriptive words. It explains because, by memorizing the properties (etc.) correlated with descriptive words we can learn to distinguish states of affairs in which statements using those words are true from those in which they are false. This will be made clearer in the next chapter, which describes some of the ways in which we may correlate descriptive words with observable properties. In addition, it should show in detail how we can make sharp distinctions between the meanings of words by taking into account the properties to which they refer, as required by the programme adopted in the previous section. (See also the motto at the end of 2.A.5.) In order to avoid digressions into philosophical psychology, I shall not deal with questions as to how we can tell which properties or things a particular person takes or intends his words to refer to, but will assume, for the time being, that we can. At any rate, each of us knows what he means his words to refer to, in most cases. This omission means that, from a certain point of view, my account of how to apply sharp criteria for identity of meanings is essentially incomplete.