

## P A R T I



# From “Meaning is Use” to the Rejection of Transcendent Truth

The later Wittgenstein’s conception of meaning as use is often taken as providing the inspiration for semantic antirealism. That is, it is taken as having inspired the view put forth by Michael Dummett and Crispin Wright in the 1980s that we should reject a theory of meaning that is based on truth conditions in favor of one based on assertibility conditions. Yet, by rejecting truth conditions, antirealists such as Dummett go much further than Wittgenstein. For, as I will argue, to hold that because Wittgenstein rejected realism he therefore must be an antirealist is to fail to recognize that Wittgenstein held a unique account of truth which does not fit neatly into the categories of realism and antirealism and which, moreover, undermines the dichotomy between them. Wittgenstein did not reject the idea that sentences have truth conditions. Rather, he revised his conception of a truth condition. He held that truth conditions are determined by criteria, that is, by conventional rules which tell us the circumstances under which it is correct to predicate “is true” of our statements. And he argued that, as statements within different language games are accepted as true upon different kinds of grounds, the kind of certainty that we require in order to accept a sentence as true depends on the language game to which the statement belongs. Therefore, Wittgenstein has a unique conception of truth which can be applied, across the board, to all sentences in language; a conception which links the truth condition of every type of sentence which is treated as being true or false to the way that the sentence is used.

I shall first outline the positive account of truth that falls out of the dictum that meaning is use. I shall then argue that the antirealist's case for replacing truth conditions with assertibility conditions presupposes a realist conception of truth which Wittgenstein explicitly rejected. Finally, I shall show how Wittgenstein's account of truth avoids the objections which can be made against both realism and antirealism. For through his more radical break with the realist/correspondence view, he puts forth an account of truth that avoids the truth value gaps that prompt the antirealist to reject truth conditions.



### ***1. Wittgenstein's Rejection of Realism versus Semantic Antirealism***

Wittgenstein's rejection of a realist conception of meaning in favor of his account of meaning as use led to his parallel rejection of a realist picture of truth which holds that propositions are true by virtue of their correspondence to facts which might transcend our capacity for knowledge. For Wittgenstein reasoned that as there is nothing more to meaning than use, there is nothing more to our concept of truth than we can grasp through our use of statements which we treat, in our language, as being true or false. In Wittgenstein's view, it only makes sense to think of truth in terms of our capacity for knowledge. For we acquire the concept of truth by learning how to apply the predicate "is true" to statements in our language, that is, by learning what counts as establishing our statements as true. And we learn what counts as establishing statements as true by participating in the linguistic practices of a community. For just as within a linguistic community we agree on correct uses of words, we also agree upon methods of testing the statements which we treat as being true or false. That is to say, as we participate together in the rule-following practices within a community, we play various kinds of language games and engage in various kinds of inquiry.<sup>1</sup> In each type of inquiry, we devise methods of testing assertions which are appropriate tests of statements within that type of language game. We agree on what is to count as an adequate test of any given type of statement. And thus we agree on criteria which determine when it is correct to predicate "is true" of sentences within each type of language game. Therefore, an individual who has mastered a language has acquired the concept of how to establish something as true. For as he is initiated into the linguistic practices of a community, he learns conventional rules for predicating "is

true" of the sentences in language which his community treats as being true or false.<sup>2</sup> Wittgenstein remarks,

What counts as [a] test [of a statement]?—"But is this an adequate test? . . ."—As if giving grounds did not come to an end sometime. But the end is not an ungrounded presupposition: it is an ungrounded way of acting. (*O.C.* #110)

Wittgenstein's contention here is that if we want to know why the ground on which we accept a particular statement is an adequate ground upon which to claim to know that it is true, we cannot hope to find the answer by looking further than the language game in which the statement is used. For there is no extralinguistic standard by reference to which we could assess the adequacy of our methods of testing our statements. Thus, just as nothing determines the meanings of words other than the rules of a linguistic community for the correct and incorrect ways of using them, nothing determines the circumstances under which it is correct to predicate "is true" of a sentence other than our agreement on the conventional rules whereby we predicate "is true" of our sentences. That is, nothing determines the conditions under which we are *correct* in predicating "is true" of a sentence other than a rule of language which tells us the grounds upon which we may accept it as true.

When Wittgenstein rejected a realist account of truth, he conceived of questions about truth in terms of questions about meaning. He held that it is only within a language in which human beings agree on conventions for predicating "is true" of their statements that statements can be said to be true or false. For it is only within a form of life—that is, within the world picture to which the language we speak commits us—that there are grounds for affirming and denying statements. He does not want to say that human agreement decides what is true and false. Instead, he holds that human agreement provides the framework within which it makes sense to speak of truth and falsehood. For "true" and "false" are linguistic predicates, that is, they apply exclusively to statements. And if there were no agreement on how to apply these predicates, then the context in which they have meaning would not exist. Thus, rather than saying that human agreement decides what is true and false, it would be more accurate to say that human agreement creates the conditions under which it is *correct* for us to predicate "is true" and "is false" of our statements. But the notion of correctness being invoked here does not correspond to what we usually think of as

making it correct to predicate “is true” of a statement—i.e., that the statement corresponds to the way things are. On a conception of meaning as use, what makes it correct for us to call statements “true” are the linguistic rules whereby we apply the predicate to statements in our language. These rules and conventions are based upon our conceptual system. Consequently, they can be revised when our conceptual system changes. Thus, Wittgenstein remarks, “It is what human beings *say* that is true or false and they agree on the language they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life” (*PI.* #241).

Agreement in form of life is logically prior to agreement in opinions. For agreement in form of life is our agreement on a shared world picture. And this world picture forms the inherited background against which we distinguish between true and false (*O.C.* #94). Or, to put the point another way, agreement in form of life is our agreement on a set of grammatical propositions or “hinge propositions” which, among other things, describe what counts as compelling grounds for certainty of statements within our different language games (cf. *O.C.* #270, #271). Thus, agreement in form of life is what grounds our ability to communicate and to argue and inquire. It provides the framework within which agreement in opinions may or may not take place.<sup>3</sup> The form of life *within which* a community's statements count as true or false cannot itself be tested for correctness.<sup>4</sup> For the set of hinge propositions which we accept as true forms our basis for making judgments. And, as Wittgenstein remarks, “If [we] want the door to turn, the hinges must stay put” (*O.C.* #343)—that is, we may not call into question the totality of statements that our community accepts as true at once if we are to continue to judge. A form of life within which hypotheses can be tested and answers given cannot be called into question all at once from within that form of life because it is the very framework within which questions can be framed (*O.C.* #205). It is the framework within which human beings are able to form and express beliefs and make assertions. Therefore, it is also the framework within which they devise methods of testing beliefs and assertions. As Wittgenstein notes,

We call something a proposition when *in our language* we apply the calculus of truth functions to it. And the use of the words “true” and “false” may be among the constituent parts of the game, and, if so, it belongs to our concept ‘proposition,’ but does not fit it. (*PI.* #136)

For the realist who holds that we can conceive of the truth of a statement independently of our practice of calling it true, the truth of

a sentence is independent of our capacity for knowledge. But for Wittgenstein, who holds that the predicate "is true" applies only to sentences in language for which we have ways of determining their truth, truth is wholly a function of our capacity for knowledge. Since the meaning of a proposition is determined by the conditions for knowledge as laid down by our conventions of testing, truth cannot be conceived of as independent of our capacity for knowledge.<sup>5</sup>



Wittgenstein's rejection of a realist picture of truth has been taken as semantic antirealism by Michael Dummett and Crispin Wright in the 1980s. Semantic antirealism, in its simplest terms, is the view that knowledge of the truth conditions of sentences in a language is not what we as language speakers acquire when we come to understand that language.<sup>6</sup> Instead, we learn the conditions under which we are justified in asserting the sentences in language which we treat as being true or false. The argument for antirealism is that some sentences which we treat as being true or false, or bivalent, would have truth conditions transcending our ability to recognize them, for the process of verifying such sentences would outrun our ability to learn of their truth value. Statements about the remote past, for example, are held by the antirealist not to be determinately true or false, because in order to know what would render such statements true or false, we would have to be able to survey the past as we do the present. Clearly, there often is nothing left of the past, and so we are unable to do so. Antirealists hold that our linguistic practice of treating such statements as determinately true or false is inaccurate and in need of revision. They argue that since we cannot have learned how to use these sentences by learning to recognize their truth conditions as obtaining when they obtain, we cannot give a truth-conditional account of their meaning, but only one in terms of the conditions which justify asserting them.

I will examine the argument for attributing this form of antirealism to Wittgenstein in part II. But for now it is important to see that Wittgenstein's rejection of a realist/correspondence account of truth is more radical than the antirealist's. The antirealist is still, in a sense, committed to the correspondence theory of truth even while he rejects the possibility of giving a truth-conditional account of meaning. That is, he implicitly assumes that the only viable account of truth would have to be a realist account. Thus, he accepts the realist view that the truth of statements about the remote past must consist of their correspondence with that particular segment of reality of which there now no

longer exists any evidence. And it is his commitment to this correspondence account of truth that forces him to deny that such statements have truth conditions after he has rejected the idea of transcendent truth, that is, after he has insisted that if something is true, it must be possible for us to know that it is true. For his belief in the correspondence theory of what makes statements about the past true causes an antirealist to hold that finding out whether they are true must involve surveying the past as we do the present. But his agreement with Wittgenstein's verificationist thought that if something is true, it must be possible for us to know that it is true, makes the antirealist say that since we cannot discover whether statements about the past are true, such statements do not have truth conditions. Thus, the antirealist denies that statements about the past have truth conditions because the only kind of truth conditions he recognizes are realist truth conditions, and when these are undermined by verificationist scruples, he has nothing left to replace them with.

Wittgenstein's rejection of a realist account of truth goes further than antirealism. For while Wittgenstein shares with antirealists the thought that if something is true it must be possible for us to know that it is true, he does not share their commitment to the realist doctrine that the truth of a statement about the past must consist in its correspondence with some segment of reality in virtue of which it is true. Thus, Wittgenstein is not forced to deny that statements about the past have truth conditions because, unlike the antirealist, he has an alternative conception of a truth condition with which to replace realist truth conditions.



## ***2. The Positive Account of Truth***

Wittgenstein holds that truth conditions are determined by criteria, that is, by rules which determine, by linguistic convention, the circumstances under which we may predicate "is true" of the sentences in language which we treat as being true or false. For, according to Wittgenstein, every type of statement to which we apply the predicates "is true" and "is false" is governed by some criterion for determining its truth value. As he remarks, "Really, 'The proposition is either true or false' only means that it must be possible to decide for or against it. But this does not say what the ground for such a decision is like" (*O.C.* #200).

In other words, whenever we treat a statement as being true or false in our language, we consider something or other to be an ad-

equate test of a statement of that kind. To say that a statement is either true or false is to say that we have some criterion for determining its truth value; that we treat something as being decisive for establishing the statement as true and, thus, as being an adequate ground upon which to affirm that statement.<sup>1</sup> And because different kinds of statements are accepted as true upon different kinds of grounds, if we want to know what our ground for affirming a particular statement is like, we must examine the language game in which the statement is used.

Criteria rules tell us, as part of the "logic" or grammar of the language games in which we apply them, what count as adequate tests of the kinds of statements that we make within these language games. For example, if our criterion for ascribing pain to someone is met—that is, if someone says that she is in pain and if questions about her truthfulness do not arise—then it is correct to affirm that she is in pain. It is a misdescription of our practice of making pain ascriptions to say that we cannot know but can only guess that another person is in pain because we do not, in *real* cases, doubt that others are in pain (*PI.* #303). The reason we do not treat our inability to feel someone else's pain as relevant to whether we can know that she is in pain is that we learn the *concept* of another's pain when we learn language—that is, when we learn how to use sentences such as "He is in pain" and "She is in pain." And the language game in which we learn to make third-person pain ascriptions begins with the *expression* of pain since, obviously, it is a background condition of our practice that we cannot feel someone else's sensation of pain (*PI.* #288). Because the background condition of our practice of making pain ascriptions places limits on what can count as evidence for statements within this language game, what we treat as establishing them as true differs from what we treat as establishing the truth value of statements within other types of language games. And, consequently, what makes it correct to predicate "is true" of statements within one language game is different from what makes it correct to predicate "is true" of statements within another language game. What counts as an adequate test of one type of statement cannot be the standard of what should count as an adequate test of another type of statement since the various kinds of statements that we treat as being true or false do not all admit of the same kind of verification. Furthermore, we have different needs and purposes in classifying our different statements as true or false, and these purposes partly determine what we are willing to treat as decisively establishing the truth value of a given kind of statement. Therefore, the kinds of criteria whereby we determine the truth values of our statements vary

across our different language games according to the background conditions of our practices and our purposes in treating statements as true or false.

In some of our language games, the criteria governing our statements take the form of tests by which we judge that something is the case, which become the conventional standards by reference to which we justify our judgments. In Wittgenstein's example, if medical science discovers that angina is caused by a certain bacillus, then to answer the question, "How do you know this man has angina?" by saying "I have found the bacillus in his blood" is to state the criterion of angina—that is, it is a loose way of defining angina. By contrast, to reply to the question "How do you know he has angina?" by citing the presence of a symptom of the condition which has been found in some way to coincide with our defining criterion is to make a hypothesis rather than to decisively justify the judgment (*B.B.*, p. 24).

In language games in which we have no way of distinguishing criteria from symptoms in a way that is not ad hoc, our criteria take the form of defining characteristics of an object or a condition, where the presence of these characteristics is decisive for establishing the existence of the thing in question. For example, in answer to the question, "How do you know that it is a diamond?" a jeweler might cite the physical properties of a stone that establish that it is a diamond. In a looser, derivative sense of the word "criterion," we could speak of the criterion of being an orange as the way an orange looks, tastes, and smells. And a speaker could justify the judgment "This is an orange" by citing the presence of these features. For these features constitute ways of telling, and language users take them as settling the truth of judgments.<sup>2</sup>

The one exception to the generalization that every type of statement which we treat as being true or false is governed by a criterion for determining its truth value is the first-person avowal "I am in pain." "I am in pain" can be either true or false since one can lie about being in pain. But it is a mistake to think of this statement as an assertion which the speaker himself could justify or determine by reference to a criterion. For there is no way that a speaker could verify or *come to know* that he was in pain. That is, there is no way that a speaker could pass through a state of not knowing that he was in pain to knowing it. Thus, the statement "I am in pain" does not express a speaker's *judgment* that he is in pain. And because this statement does not express a judgment, it is not governed by a criterion.

By contrast, whenever we make judgments and assertions, we employ criteria by reference to which we justify our assertions. For an



essential feature of criteria is that they can be cited in response to the question "How do you know that such and such is the case?" Criteria provide the grounds whereby we justify our judgments by describing what counts as settling the truth of particular types of statements.

Statements of criterial rules determine the truth conditions of our statements because they state grammatical truths or conceptually necessary statements. That is to say, it is true in virtue of a rule of language, convention, or definition that if a certain bacillus is found in someone's blood, that person has angina. Thus, as long as this bacillus remains our criterion of having angina, it is not logically possible that the bacillus should be present and the criterially governed object (angina) absent. Or, to take another example, it is not logically possible for our criterion for saying that someone is in pain to be met and for that person not to be in pain.<sup>3</sup> For criteria determine, as part of the grammar or logic of a statement that some state of affairs obtains, the circumstances under which it is correct to affirm the statement. They define what it means to call something true within a particular language game. Therefore, it is not possible for the criterion of a claim to be met and for the criterially governed claim to be false, for this would violate a rule of language.



Criteria differ from realist truth conditions in that a conventional rule for predicating "is true" of a sentence is always linked to the way in which we currently use a sentence. For another way of putting the point that truth conditions are determined by criteria is to say that truth conditions are determined by our current ways of determining our statements' truth values. And, of course, the consequence of the view that the truth condition of a statement is determined by our current way of telling whether it is true is that the truth condition of any given statement must be internally related to our current capacity for knowledge. For the standards by which we judge whether something is true reflect what we know at a particular time. What we accept as an adequate ground on which to accept a statement as true reflects the current state of our knowledge. And, obviously, the grounds upon which we accept our statements as true can change in response to empirical discoveries.

What we currently take to be a defining characteristic of some state of affairs which is decisive for establishing that it obtains can subsequently be discovered to be merely contingently associated with it (*PI.* #354; *B.B.*, pp. 24–25; *Z.* #438). That is, there can be a fluctuation between criteria and symptoms. For example, from the beginning of the seventeenth to the late nineteenth century, the defining criterion

of gold was solubility in aqua regia. But in the nineteenth century it was discovered that gold had the atomic number 79, a feature not exclusively correlated with the feature of solubility in aqua regia; that is, the former criterion was discovered to have room for non-“noble” metals whereas the latter criterion uniquely defined “gold.” Thus, with the discovery of the atomic number of gold, the old criterion was downgraded to symptom status.<sup>4</sup> We can also simply discover that we were wrong about what we previously held as true; we were not yet aware of any countervailing factors which would have cast doubt upon our ways of judging (*O.C.* #124). Therefore, the conventions according to which it is correct to predicate “is true” of our statements are subject to revision as our knowledge increases. As Wittgenstein remarks, our language games change with time (*O.C.* #256). What gets treated one day as a proposition to be tested by experience may get treated another day as a rule of testing (*O.C.* #198; cf. *O.C.* #63, #65; *Z.* #352). And, conversely, propositions which were treated as norms of description can come to lose that status. For example, the statements “It is impossible to get to the moon,” “Lightning never strikes in the same place twice,” and perhaps “The earth is flat” were accepted as true by previous groups of inquirers, but they are not held true today. The thrust of identifying truth conditions with criteria or conventional rules is that the Wittgensteinian wants to say that previous inquirers were *correct* to say “It’s true that lightning never strikes in the same place twice,” and so forth, although it would now be incorrect to predicate “is true” of those sentences (*O.C.* #542, #607, #124, #191).

Those with realist sympathies will resist saying that our criteria determine the conditions under which it is correct to predicate “is true” of our statements. They will argue that if we turn out to be wrong about what we held true, we will not have been correct to predicate “is true” of a statement asserting it. For, according to any type of realist, what makes it correct to predicate “is true” of a statement is something other than the fact that our current criterion for calling it true is met. For example, the correspondence theorist will say that it is correct to predicate “is true” of a statement only if it corresponds with the way things are. And the internal realist or pragmatist will say that it is correct to predicate “is true” of a statement only if that statement should happen to be one that would still be believed if inquiry were to be pursued as far as it could fruitfully go.<sup>5</sup> And according to either of these conceptions of what makes our applications of “is true” correct, if it is incorrect for us to predicate “is true” of a statement on a certain basis now, it was incorrect for us to apply the truth predicate to that statement earlier, even if it was rationally acceptable to refer to that basis at the time.

The Wittgensteinian reply to the realist is that, if it is not to be a mystery how we can learn the meaning of "is true," we need to jettison the notion that what makes our applications of "is true" correct is something that could transcend our current knowledge. For by espousing an account of what constitutes a correct use of "is true," which makes the correctness of our applications of the predicate depend upon something which can outrun our current knowledge, we are attempting to attach a meaning to "is true" which outruns the use to which we can put the predicate. If we are to be able to give an account of the meaning which "is true" has in *our* language, it must be possible to explain how we could learn to use "is true" correctly. And it can only be possible to explain how we can learn to use "is true" correctly if what makes our applications of "is true" correct is taken as something which we could *recognize* as making them correct. Therefore, what makes our applications of "is true" correct must be something within the current scope of our knowledge. In other words, our applications of "is true" can only be made correct by the criteria that we currently accept as adequate tests of our statements. And these criteria can only be based upon the current state of our knowledge.

Furthermore, it is a feature of the growth of knowledge that there is never a point at which we can say that the statements which we currently hold as true are no longer open to revision, for our epistemic perspective on the growth of knowledge is limited by our being temporally located at a discrete point in the course of human inquiry. This limit forces us to say, with Wittgenstein, that "sure evidence is what we *accept* as sure" (*O.C.* #196). That is, it only makes sense to *call* sure evidence "evidence that we currently accept as sure." For we have no way of knowing what evidence *will be* held sure in the future. As Hilary Putnam has pointed out, statements which were rationally acceptable before are no longer rationally acceptable. And, for all we know, the criteria whereby we currently judge statements to be true or false will not be the same criteria whereby future generations will predicate "is true" and "is false" of their statements. So the Wittgensteinian will argue that if truth is one of *our* concepts, then the meaning of "is true" must be taken as being determined by *our* criteria for applying the predicate to particular statements in our current linguistic practices. The criteria whereby we apply the truth predicate reflect the state of our knowledge at a particular time. Therefore, what makes it correct to predicate "is true" of a statement must be internally related to our current capacity for knowledge.

Another way of putting this point is that what makes it correct to predicate "is true" of a statement cannot outrun what we know at a

given time, and thus what we can assert. For unlike other predicates which apply to that which can be conceived independently of our linguistic practices, "is true" applies exclusively to bits of language such as beliefs, statements, and assertions. Hence, the concept of "a truth" is equivalent to the concept of a true belief, statement, or assertion. As Donald Davidson remarks, without creatures using sentences, the concept of truth would have no application.<sup>6</sup> And this is why we cannot explain the concept of truth without reference to human agreement on how to classify assertions as true. For an assertion is something that has a use within a language; it is something that we want to say can be made correctly or incorrectly. And we could not give content to saying that a speaker had asserted something correctly or incorrectly if we did not agree on what counts as a proper basis upon which to make an assertion. For here we should have no criterion for saying that someone had asserted something correctly (cf. *P.I.* #199, #202, #258, #265). That is, it is a property of assertions that we do employ criteria which tell us when it is correct to make them. So an assertion for which we had no such criterion could not play a role in any of our language games. Therefore, what makes it correct to make an assertion—and hence to apply the truth predicate to an assertion—can only be construed in terms of our agreement on how to classify an assertion as true. Thus, when we change our ways of judging our statements' truth values, we change the conditions under which it is correct to call our statements "true."

It follows that truth is not a use-independent property of a statement. Nor is truth a relation between a thought or a statement and a mind- or language-independent item like a fact. The predicates "is true" and "is false" do not apply to facts, but to what is said. And what is said is not like what is eaten, for instance, a cake. The word "what" in the phrase "what is said" does not name an object. Instead, it introduces a propositional clause or a "that" clause. It introduces a belief or an assertion which gets expressed in language by a thinking creature.<sup>7</sup> And what determines the conditions under which it is correct to make an assertion is our normative agreement, *here and now*, on what count as adequate grounds *upon which* to affirm a statement (*O.C.* #270, #271, #200, #82). For it is a background condition of our practice of applying the truth predicate that we cannot foresee our acquisition of any information which would make it incorrect for us to apply "is true" to our statements, even though we know that it is theoretically possible that we may acquire such information. Therefore, the fact that previous communities held as true statements like "Lightning never strikes in the same place twice," and so forth, made it *correct* to predicate "is true" of those sentences, although it did *not* make it correct to predicate "is true" of them *come what may*.

That is, it did not make it correct to predicate "is true" of them in the light of future discoveries or recalcitrant experience. Rather, our empirical discoveries caused us to revise the conditions under which we were willing to predicate "is true" of these sentences of which we previously had been objectively certain (*Z.* #352).<sup>8</sup> But nevertheless, before we were forced to revise our ways of judging the truth values of these sentences, that is, before we revised our conventions for predicating "is true" of them, it was *correct* to predicate "is true" of them. For although we must revise our application of "is true" to sentences when we find we can no longer take them as true, there is no other use which "is true" could have in our language—there is no other way in which it would be correct to use it—except as a predicate which we apply to whatever we *now* take true. As Wittgenstein puts this point,

Well if everything speaks for an hypothesis and nothing speaks against it—is it certainly true? One may designate it as such.—But does it agree with reality, with the facts?—With this question, you are already going round in a circle. (*O.C.* #191)

Wittgenstein's point here is that no new information is gained by asking whether a statement which we *designate* as true agrees with reality or with the facts. For the concepts of truth and falsity cannot be explained without reference to our practice of *calling* statements true (*P.I.* #136). Nor, therefore, can they be explained without reference to our agreement on the standards by which we judge statements as true and the grounds upon which we accept them as true: "The reason why the use of the expression 'true or false' has something misleading about it is that it is like saying 'it tallies with the facts or it doesn't,' and the very thing that is in question is what 'tallying' is here" (*O.C.* #199). That is: we may conceivably revise our world picture so that today's propositions will not seem to tally with what we will then take as "the facts." But this possibility plays no role in our practice of *treating* statements as true or false or acting *as though* they were true or false (*O.C.* #110, #652, #342, #341, #343). What determines the correct uses of "is true" can only be our agreement, within a community, on the conventions and criteria whereby we apply the predicate to statements. So to ask whether we are correct to predicate "is true" of a statement will only be a question about what our practice actually is, rather than a query about whether this practice is actually justified by reference to some extralinguistic standard which is informed by facts that transcend our current knowledge.<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, to paraphrase an argument of Hans-Johann Glock's, to express the fact that the way things are is independent of what we say

about it by saying “Before 1900, there was a truth that there were radioactive substances” is infelicitous. And so is the even more acceptable “It was true before 1900 that there were radioactive substances.” What can be said is “It is true that before 1900 there were radioactive substances.” And this is logically equivalent to “There were radioactive substances before 1900.” That this was so independently of our thinking so has nothing to do with the mind-independent nature of truth nor with the alleged eternal existence of an abstract realm in which truths subsist. It has everything to do with the fact that our saying that *p* doesn't make it the case that *p*. Our conception of truth as objective—that is, as not being dependent on what anyone says or thinks—arises from our awareness that “People say that *p*” and “*p*” do not entail each other.<sup>10</sup> The conditions under which we are correct to predicate “is true” of a statement at a given time and the conditions under which the statement corresponds to reality can come apart. We recognize that they can come apart. And we use “is true” as though these conditions do come apart in our practice of affirming or asserting our statements. We do not take the fact that we currently predicate “is true” of any given sentence as making it correct to continue to predicate “is true” of it *come what may*. We predicate “is true” of our sentences knowing full well that it is theoretically conceivable that they may have to be withdrawn (*O.C.* #620, #652). And when we find out that we were wrong about something, we are willing to revise our practice of applying the truth predicate to a given statement. But although we hold in such a case that we were wrong *about* what we asserted, we do not say that we were wrong to *predicate* “is true” of our statement at the time when we made it. We do not say this any more than one would say that one was wrong to say “I know that N.N. will arrive in half an hour's time,” when one has spoken to N.N. ten minutes ago on the telephone, even if N.N. gets into an accident after calling and never does arrive. In such a situation, we would have to say that we didn't *actually* know, but only thought we knew. But it would be misleading to say that someone had not been right to *say* “I know” in a context in which his or her knowledge claim had been justified merely because the content of the claim had actually been false (*O.C.* #542).

By parity of reasoning, it is incoherent to say that we were incorrect to apply the truth predicate to a statement that we were once justified in accepting merely because the statement has since been falsified and revised. For, as we saw in the first chapter, if we did not treat the statements that we are currently justified in accepting *as though* they were true *in spite* of our knowing that any of them may be revised, we would not have a framework within which we could conceive of possible

recalcitrant experiences.<sup>11</sup> Hence, we would not have a framework within which to classify beliefs as true or false, for we would not have a framework within which to judge. As Wittgenstein puts this point,

if you tried to doubt everything, you would not get as far as doubting anything. The game of doubting itself presupposes certainty (O.C. #115). All testing . . . and disconfirmation of a hypothesis takes place already within a system. And this system is . . . the element in which arguments have their life. (O.C. #105)

Therefore, insofar as our practice requires us to treat the statements that we are currently justified in accepting as true, we have to say that we were *correct* to treat a statement that we have revised as true at the time when we were justified in accepting it. And once we grant that we were correct to treat a statement *as though* it were true, it is unclear what it would mean to say that we were not correct to *call* it true. As Wittgenstein remarks, “A judge might even say ‘That is the truth—so far as a human being can know it.’ But what would this rider achieve? (‘beyond all reasonable doubt’)” (O.C. #607).

The fact that we revise the conditions under which we apply the truth predicate to particular statements does not mean that “is true” applies to what is independent of our current knowledge. For “is true” is a word which is used to predicate something of beliefs. Its meaning—which, on a Wittgensteinian view, boils down to its correct use—depends on our normative agreement on how we are to apply it in particular cases. The conditions under which it is correct to predicate “is true” of a sentence depend on our agreement on how the predicate is to be applied to a particular kind of sentence. They depend on our agreement on what counts as an adequate test of a particular kind of statement, that is, of a statement within a particular kind of language game (O.C. #82). This means that the predicate “is true” can only be meaningfully applied to a sentence for which we have some criterion or some convention whereby we predicate “is true” or “is false” of it. We cannot give content to calling something true where we have no criterion for determining its truth or falsehood.

Hans-Johann Glock would take issue with the last thought that I have expressed because he thinks that truths can exist without people. According to Glock, if there were no people, it would still be a truth that there are mountains. For, as he argues,

1. “If there were no people, there would still be mountains”

implies

2. "If there were no people, it would still be true that there are mountains,"

which in turn seems to imply

3. "If there were no people, it would still be a truth that there are mountains."

Richard Rorty has recently objected to the move from the first statement to the second by asking, "What is 'be true' supposed to mean in a world in which there are no statements to be true nor minds to have true beliefs?"<sup>12</sup> According to Rorty, the realist cannot reply to this question without dogmatically presupposing his account of truth. Glock argues that Rorty's conclusion is precipitous because it runs together the question of what "is true" means *in* a world without people with what it means *of* a world without people: "[the fact that] in a world without people, no one would be in a position to explain the meaning of 'is true' or use it in statements like (2) does not entail that *we* cannot meaningfully use 'is true' to make a statement like (2)." However, Glock's reasoning here is inconsistent with his other claim that "It was true before 1900 that there were radioactive substances" is infelicitous. For the reason that this statement is infelicitous is that *in that time* there was no such truth. The reason that *we* can say "It's true that there were radioactive substances before 1900" is that we can formulate that proposition *now*. Therefore, if Glock wants to claim that the counterfactual "If there were no people it would still be true that there are mountains" is a claim about what "is true" means *of* a world without people, then he owes us an account of why he gives the temporal adverb "Before 1900" an "in" reading while he gives the counterfactual adverb "If there were no people" an "of" reading, given that both types of adverbs are sentential operators. For, from the point of view of modal logic, the "in/of" distinction is a scope distinction. And scope distinctions are purely formal. Grammatically and formally, all sentential operators play the same role.<sup>13</sup>

Moreover, we do not need to invoke the "in/of" distinction to show that the claim "If there were no people it would still be a truth that there are mountains" is a claim about what "is true" means *in* a world without people. We need not use the language of modal logic to show that the realist cannot reply to the question "What is 'be true' supposed to mean in a world in which there are no minds to have true beliefs?" without dogmatically presupposing his own account of truth.



We need only ask, "What is the word '*it*' supposed to refer to in the sentence, "If there were no people, *it* would still be true that there are mountains"? It must surely refer to some bit of language, such as a belief or an assertion. For even if this sentence is paraphrased as "If there were no people, *that* there are mountains would still be true," we are still left with a counterfactual adverb modifying a that-clause. And a that-clause introduces a propositional attitude such as a belief. Now we can ask, In virtue of *what* could such a belief or assertion be true? In virtue of what would it be *correct* to predicate "is true" of "There are mountains"? In virtue of which standards of classification would some things count as mountains? Of course, what we call mountains would still exist, but if there were no intersubjective agreement on what counts as a mountain, what would make it correct to predicate "is true" of "there are mountains"? And if nothing could make it correct to predicate "is true" of "there are mountains," then in virtue of what would it be true? In virtue of what *could* it be true other than in virtue of that statement's correspondence with a fact—specifically, with the fact that *what* we call mountains would still exist in the absence of human conceptualization and classification? And if the realist were to give this answer, then he would, as Rorty says, be dogmatically presupposing his account of truth. For, as P. M. S. Hacker points out, on a Wittgensteinian view, what is true or false is what is believed, and what is believed are not *sentences*, but what is expressed by their use.<sup>14</sup> So in a world in which there was no use of language, there would be nothing that would be true or false. My point here goes beyond Donald Davidson's observation and Cheryl Misak's observation that if there were no beliefs for the truth predicate to apply to, truth would be "an uninstantiated property."<sup>15</sup> The problem lies deeper than that: if there were no speakers, there would be no intersubjective agreement *in virtue of which* beliefs and assertions could be true. And, thus, I think we can say: although the conditions under which something is *real* or is the case are independent of our normative agreement, the conditions under which it is correct to predicate "is true" of a sentence are wholly dependent on our normative agreement. These conditions are dependent on our agreement on what count as adequate grounds upon which to affirm our statements (*O.C.* #82, #270, #271). And the grounds which we consider to be telling or adequate on which to accept our statements as true can only reflect the state of our knowledge at a particular time.

We see, therefore, how Wittgenstein's conception of meaning as use implies the rejection of a realist account of truth. His conception of the truth condition of a sentence in terms of a convention for predicating "is true" of it or a conventionally accepted way of telling whether

it is true entails the rejection of any view whereby truth can transcend our current capacity for knowledge. The realist objects to saying that truth conditions are determined by our current criteria for determining truth values because of his concern about yet-to-be-discovered facts. For he holds that if we could turn out to be wrong about what we previously held to be true, then the view that criteria determine truth conditions amounts to a kind of idealism. That is, it amounts to the view that the way things are is a product of our thought and talk. We have seen how Wittgenstein can avoid this charge of idealism by distinguishing the grammar of "is real" from the grammar of "is true."

The antirealist, as we shall see, also takes issue with the view that criteria determine truth conditions. For while he agrees with Wittgenstein's thought that truth cannot transcend our capacity for knowledge, he is also committed to the realist conception of truth as correspondence with reality. This places him in a dilemma about what to say about yet-to-be-discovered or undiscoverable facts given his prior commitment to the view of truth as correspondence and his subsequent rejection of the notion of transcendent truth. He attempts to relieve the tension in the following way: he holds that given that there *are* undiscovered facts and given that truth cannot transcend our capacity for knowledge, we should simply jettison the concept of truth and replace it with that of assertibility.<sup>16</sup>

Wittgenstein holds that the antirealist's move ought to be resisted (*O.C.* #607). For the fact is that we *use* the predicate "is true" to indicate that we are basing a claim we are making on our current norms of verification. We have a picture of truth as correspondence because of our awareness of the fact that "We say that p" does not entail "p." That is, we picture truth as correspondence because we know that the fact that we call a statement true does not necessarily mean that it will be correct to call it true in the future. This gives us a strong inclination to think of the truth conditions of our statements as being stable and determinate. We feel that what *makes* it correct to predicate "is true" of a given statement cannot change merely because we have increased our knowledge. But the fact is that we do use "is true" as though we are correct to affirm as true the statements which we currently count as true. We use "is true" as though we are *correct* to apply the truth predicate to the statements we currently hold true, even though we know that it is in principle possible that what we hold true today may not be held true in the future, just as we have revised statements which were previously held true. And, as I shall argue in part III, an implication of the fact that we treat our criteria *both* as determining the conditions

under which it is correct for us to predicate "is true" of our statements *and* as being in principle revisable is that we need to revise our traditional picture of truth. We should not, therefore, accept an account of truth which respects the realist's intuition of truth in terms of correspondence with facts which could transcend our knowledge. And we should not join the antirealists in jettisoning the notion of truth out of respect for this intuition. For the conception of truth conditions in terms of criteria provides us with a way of arguing against the very idea of transcendent truth.



### 3. *Antirealism Revisited*

Wittgenstein's view that criteria determine truth conditions undercuts the realist thought motivating semantic antirealism, namely, that some sentences might have truth conditions which transcend our ability to recognize them. For, as we have seen, Wittgenstein's novel conception of a truth condition links the truth condition of every sentence in language which is treated as being true or false with the way that the sentence is used. Wittgenstein held that in every area of discourse or, in his terminology, in every type of language game, we predicate "is true" of a sentence because the satisfaction of the criterion governing it decisively establishes it as true. For by linguistic convention, if the criterion of a claim is met, it is certain that a criterially governed claim is true. He further held that statements belonging to different language games, for example, "It is true that Jones is in pain," "It is true that C.M. was born in 1961," and "It is true that Moses lived" are used differently in the context of affirming and denying them although we predicate "is true" of each of them. Because they belong to different language games, we recognize different kinds of criteria as decisive for establishing their truth. The criterion that Jones is in pain is Jones's pain behavior coupled with a criterion that he is not merely pretending. And the criterion that C.M. was born in 1961 is one type of record, while the criterion that Moses lived is yet another type of record which would be considered insufficient to establish the truth of a statement of the former type. Therefore, while it is possible to be certain of each of these types of statements, they are different kinds of certain propositions; that is, they are used to express different kinds of certainty. As Wittgenstein describes the difference between different types of statements which we treat as being true or false in our language,

I can be as certain of someone else's sensations as of any fact. But this does not make the propositions, "He is much depressed," " $25 \times 25 = 625$ ," and "I am sixty years old" into similar instruments. The explanation suggests itself that the certainty is of a different kind. This seems to point to a psychological process. But the difference is logical. . . . The kind of certainty is the kind of language game. (*PI*, p. 224)

Wittgenstein cautions us not to infer from the fact that we accept different kinds of statements as true upon different kinds of grounds that some statements to which we apply the predicate "is true" are more certain than others or that the predicate "is true" is actually misapplied to some sentences. For example, we should not think that because the certainty expressed by the statement "It is true that he is depressed" is different from the certainty expressed by "It is true that I am sixty" and "It is true that  $25 \times 25 = 625$ ," the first statement involves a misuse of the predicate "is true" because we can never definitively determine whether it is true. For every statement in language which we treat as being true or false is treated as being true or false because we have a criterion of its truth which counts as an adequate test of a statement within that language game. That is to say, we call a proposition true or false when we have a conventional way of determining whether it is true which we intersubjectively agree upon as being decisive for establishing the truth of that type of statement. And naturally, what counts as an adequate test of one type of statement is different from what counts as an adequate test of another type. This does not mean that statements such as "He is in pain" in contrast to statements such as "She lives on Charles Street West" are not determinately true or false or do not have truth conditions. Rather, it means that the former type of statement is not used to express the same kind of certainty as the latter, for we employ different kinds of criteria in determining the truth of each.

Antirealists assume that because we cannot ascertain the truth values of statements referring to the remote past or to other peoples' mental states in the same way that we can ascertain the truth values of other types of statements, the former are not determinately true or false, and our conventional practice of treating them as bivalent is inaccurate. Wittgenstein's answer to this is that we should not expect to be able to ascertain the truth values of each type of truth functional statement in the same way before we are prepared to predicate "is true" of each of them. We should keep in mind that what we treat as an adequate test of one statement is different from what we treat as being an adequate test of another. As Wittgenstein remarks,

"What is internal is hidden from us."—The future is hidden from us. But does an astronomer think like this when he calculates an eclipse of the sun? If I see someone writhing in pain with evident cause, I do not think: all the same, his feelings are hidden from me. (*P.I.*, p. 223)

We cannot find out whether future-tense statements are true in the same way that we can determine the truth of statements about the present. But given that statements about the future are used to make predictions, we are as entitled to call them true on the basis on which we make them as we are in classifying statements about the present as true on the grounds upon which we assert these.

Antirealists who claim that we are incorrect in classifying some statements as bivalent depart from Wittgenstein in that they refuse to take the way in which we use a statement as relevant to whether we should treat it as determinately true or false. But Wittgenstein would claim that if truth is to be an explicable concept, then the way in which we use a statement must be taken as being relevant to whether we can classify it as bivalent. And what it means to call a statement true varies across different language games as our manner of calculating truth values varies in different areas of discourse. Thus, once we realize the nuances in our uses of the predicate "is true," the idea that statements about the past are not determinately true or false because we cannot verify them in the same way that we can verify statements about the recent past reflects a failure to see the significance of the fact that "Moses lived" and "C.M. was born in 1961" are not used to make the same type of assertion.<sup>1</sup>

According to Wittgenstein, the only way for a statement to have a truth condition transcending our capacity for knowledge would be for a statement to be governed by a criterion which we could never ascertain as having been met. But this is not a logical possibility. It is possible that in a particular case it might be a contingent fact that we might be unable to ascertain whether the criterion of a claim was met. In John Canfield's example, we might make the criterion of a chess player's being a grandmaster his having a particular rating. And it is possible that in a particular case, the records of a chess player's rating might be destroyed so that we might be contingently unable to determine whether the criterion of his being a grandmaster had been met.<sup>2</sup> But in Wittgenstein's view, it is not logically possible for a statement which we treat as being true or false to be governed by a criterion which we could never, *in principle*, recognize as having been met. For he connects meaning with use, and knowing the circumstances under which to

predicate "is true" of a sentence which we treat as being true or false is part of knowing how to use that sentence. Therefore, such a sentence could not be governed by a criterion which we could never, in principle, recognize as having been met, for in that case we could never have learned when to predicate "is true" of a sentence which we treat as having a truth value. That is, a sentence which we treat as being true or false could not logically be governed by a criterion which we could never recognize as having been met, for in that case, we could never have learned how to use the sentence.

To be sure, we can think of declarative sentences which lack criteria of truth. One such sentence is the inverted spectrum hypothesis which Wittgenstein mentions at *P.I.* #272, that one section of mankind might have one sensation of red and another section another.<sup>3</sup> But precisely because this type of sentence has no criterion of truth, we cannot, contrary to first impressions, treat it as being true or false. And therefore, Wittgenstein argues, we cannot properly classify it as a hypothesis or a proposition or as any other type of sentence which we think of as bearing a truth value. What Wittgenstein says about the inverted spectrum hypothesis at *P.I.* #272 is not that it is possible to make it although it is unverifiable. Rather, he says that on the assumption that the word "red" refers to a private exemplar, the hypothesis *would* be possible, though unverifiable. But this consequence shows the absurdity of that assumption. For if the meaning of the word "red" were taken as something that each person could know only from his own case rather than as the concept which we acquire when we learn what we are to *call* "red,"<sup>4</sup> then it is not clear what it could mean to question or affirm that something was red. For in that case, there could be no normative standard of what counts as being red. Consequently, the word "red" could not have any intersubjective meaning; we could never have learned to use it in sentences ascribing the quality of being red to objects. Given that the word "red" does have an intersubjective meaning, it is absurd to suppose that we could construe its meaning as its private reference rather than as its use.

By parity of reasoning, it is absurd to think of the inverted spectrum hypothesis, which rests on the assumption of private reference, as a possible hypothesis or proposition or as the sort of thing which we really think of as being either true or false. For we could only have come to think of it as a true or false proposition if we treated it as being true or false in our language, that is, if we used it in the contexts of affirming it and denying it. Or, as Wittgenstein puts it, we could only have come to think of it as a proposition if, *in our language*, we applied the calculus of truth functions to it. But we cannot apply the calculus

of truth functions to the inverted spectrum hypothesis, that is, we cannot use it in the contexts of affirming it and denying it, because there is no criterion whereby we could predicate "is true" or "is false" of it. And this means that we can never have learned the circumstances under which we should affirm it as true. Hence, Wittgenstein's view is that every sentence which is treated as being true or false in our language is treated as being true or false only insofar as we have a criterion whereby we predicate "is true" of it, which tells us the grounds on which to affirm a statement of that type. For it is by learning the grounds or criterion of a sentence that we learn how to use such a sentence in the context of making affirmations and denials. Thus, Wittgenstein's conception of the truth condition of a sentence in terms of the use of the sentence undermines the realist thought that some sentences may have truth conditions transcending our ability to recognize them.