Wittgenstein and Quine.

Wittgenstein is generous with methodological advice. One particularly valuable tip that he gives is that one should treat philosophical problems rather like conjuring tricks,and figure that by the time you are invited to join in the trick has already been played,the situation set up to force you in certain directions. Another thing he warns about is focussing attention too exclusively upon the 'tangibles' at the expense of rather more intangible surroundings. Thus,in respect of considering how children learn the meaning of words,it is only too easy to be drawn into focussing upon the particular occasion and certain visible features of it: the demonstrably pointing finger,the object being pointed at and the name being uttered. Drawn into doing this one overlooks the somewhat more intangible (but nonetheless actual and consequential) things which provide the 'stage setting' for that transaction,such as the history of the relations between the adult and child and the ways in which they have set the situation up such that the exercise in 'ostensive definition' can work because the child knows what relevantly to be looking for and how,relevantly,the name is to be taken.

Some people think that Wittgenstein is very like W.V.O Quine,that their philosophies teach very similar lessons,but we wish that the latter had taken much more notice of the former,for had he done so he would not perhaps have set up the arguments

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about 'the indeterminacy of translation' for which he is famous.

Quine offers a vivid and concrete picture of one person trying to learn the language of another,a situation in which two adults find themselves in positions very similar to those of adult and child. One adult is trying to learn the language of another (but in a context of 'radical translation',one which we will explicate a little later) through the use of ostensive definition. Now Wittgenstein might be thought to be like Quine in that the former has demonstrated that any ostensive definition could be taken in a number of ways,and that it is precisely this same point which the latter's 'indeterminacy of translation' is intended to make. However,Wittgenstein has not shown perhaps that ,theoretically,and in the absence of anything to make its point and role quite clear an ostensive definition could be taken in any number of ways,but he has not surely set out to show that in actual situations where ostensive definiton is employed that they could,except in the service of perversity,be taken in more than one way. Quine thus projects an envisaged situation which is provided with no 'stage setting': two adults,who are from distinct cultures,as remote from each other as it is possible to get and without any assured common ground against which to pitch their operations,are engaged in the giving and receiving of instruction. One is trying to learn the language of the other. This is done through one pointing and exclaiming : thus,what we know to be a rabbit appears and the cry goes out 'Gavagai!'.

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There is some regularity to this,in that whenever rabbits appear the same cry and so we might naively figure that 'Gavagai' translates as rabbit. However,Quine tells us that we cannot be sure,for it may just be a coincidence that the word 'gavagai' will occur whereever 'rabbit' would,in our tongue go and it may be that these do not mean the same. To explain,he points us toward such possibilities as these: that 'gavagai' might mean something more akin to 'undetached rabbit part' such that whenever a rabbit would appear,so too would various undetached rabbit parts; that 'gavagai' might be an exclamation:'lo,rabbithood',for these people might have 'an ontology' different to ours and might not use the near equivalent of 'rabbit' as a count noun but as a mass term,such that whenever what we would individuate as a rabbit would manifest,for them a portion of rabbithood would reveal itself. Whatever the merits of Quine's arguments,that anyone could think them akin to Wittgenstein's is astonishing. Since,though,they apparently do,we will try to give as convincing demonstration that they are just about as far from Wittgenstein as its possible to get.

Enter Kripke.

Of late,Saul Kripke's account of Wittgenstein on rules and meaning has gained much attention,publicity and notoriety. The essence of Kripke's argument is that Wittgenstein gives a

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'skeptical solution' to the problem of rule following,showing that we have no reason to suppose that a person does mean a definite thing on any occasion when they use a word. They may appear,so far,to have used a word in a consistent way,but we have no basis for assuming that they will continue in the future: they might suddenly veer quite away from the policy we thought they were pursuing,thus showing us that they had never followed the policy we had imagined,but had always been operating according to some other principle than that which we have (it now proves,provisionally) figured out. There is,therefore,no fact which can establish that on this occasion of the following of a rule (of the use of a word,since the using of words is a 'rule following' matter) that they were definitely doing this (or that,for certain, they meant that).

Numerous people have pointed out that this is certainly inaccurate as an interpretation of Wittgenstein and that,if anything,he is out to show the vacuity of so called 'skeptical solutions.' Our own way of arguing to the inadequacy of Kripke is,briefly,this: that if Kripke were to say 'there is no further fact which shows how a person intended an expression to be taken' then he might come closer to characterising what Wittgenstein does say and also showing up the nature and sources of his own understanding. Kripke,like many philosophers whom Wittgenstein criticises,simply cannot recognise when they have enough for the dissolution of their worries. Thinking that the

considerations already assembled won't do they imagine that more are called for. Thus,Wittgenstein patiently tries to show us not that there is room for skeptical doubt about another's meaning,but that **there is no room for skeptical doubt**,and that all we need recognise is the fact that a person used a word in a certain way **is** to use it with that meaning. We need no further fact to establish that they used it thus,and with that meaning,the conviction that we do being another philosophical delusion. It is not Wittgenstein,**but Kripke**, who thinks that certainty about someone's meaning can only be assured if we can point to some further fact about them to show that they did,indeed,attend that meaning. But then,Wittgenstein has persistently tried to point us to the fact that (so to speak) what an individual can mean by a word has nothing to do with that individual's intentions,but with the place of their utterances in the speaking of the language. A person does not get a word to mean a certain thing,for example,by intending that meaning,but simply by speaking that word in the context of the conventions of our language. Similarly,a hearer does not divine the meanings and intentions of a speaker by investigating the life and history of that person but by simply seeing that the other speaks in the words of their language,and by construing those expressions in accord with the conventions of the language.

Wittgenstein gets us to wonder about someone who writes a letter to a friend called Tom,but who has,as it happens,two

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friends call Tom,with the intention of showing us how foolish we would be to search for some fact about the correspondent which would show us which of the two friends the letter was for. It certainly would not be the case that,in the absence of any fact about the letter writing which would show us which he meant,that it would be uncertain whether the letter was for one friend or another,that the addressee of the letter would be indeterminate,even for the correspondent. The nature of the adressee is determinate and no doubt could be determined by such facts as the address and salutations in the letter,the contents of the correspondance and so on. No 'further fact' about the writer is needed,unless one falls for the idea that the direction of the letter to a recipient is a matter of some sort of 'internal' accompaniment to the writing of it. Thus,nothing assures that this letter is addressed to 'Tom Brown' and not to 'Tom Black' above and beyond the fact that it is so addressed,that it was written with Tom Brown,not Tom Black 'in mind'. Similarly,the fact that someone who says 'The king was in his counting house counting out his money' will mean by 'the king' what the rest of us mean by it simply because they say it with that meaning,with its standard meaning,and not because of any additional fact about them which comprises 'meaning it that way.'

Kripke does not just misconstrue Wittgenstein,we say,but perpetuates the misconceptions about the nature of meaning which

the latter assiduously condemned. Quine is very like Kripke in this respect. Far from sharing Wittgenstein's views,or having a philosophy strongly reminiscent of his,Quine is fondly attached to ideas about meaning which the other thinks quite perverse.

Let us return to the 'gavagai.' Quine is about the skeptical business. It is not just that there is uncertainty about which way the native might mean 'gavagai!',but there must be uncertainty as to whether the native does mean anything definite by it. At least,its a good question whether there is any 'fact of the matter' to decide between two translations of the same expression. 'Rabbit','undetached rabbit parts' and 'rabbithood' are all compatible and intersubstitutible in the same situations,each one will fit with the same evidence and there is no further evidence that will decide between them. However,by 'evidence' Quine seems to mean something like 'a tangible difference': there is no physical fact which would prove compatible with one but not the other translation,in the way in which in the case of natural science hypotheses there will be some material difference in the universe.

There is yet more to Quine's argument. A lot is built into it,a lot which is needed to make his apparently concrete example do the work he intends it to. It is not,of course,the case that the two persons are encountering each other in this way and trying to pin down a meaning for the word 'gavagai'. They are not really trying to translate this word from 'Jungle' into

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'English' but are actually trying to translate Jungle into English,one language into another. Quine,never let it be forgotten,is a thoroughgoing holist,and believes that one does not translate something said into one language into something that can be said in another language,but that one is translating languages as wholes into each other. The attempt to come to some solution to 'gavagai' is just the beginning part of working up a translation manual for squaring the two languages up altogether. And,of course,since there is no 'fact of the matter',no tangible things against which to check different schemes,it is entirely possible that several different systems could be contrived for 'the same language'. They might differ to the extent that one would have 'rabbit' mean 'here is a rabbit' and the other have it mean 'there is no rabbit here' because the determination of a sense for any part must occur within the appropriate translation system