

Anti-realist Semantics: the Role of *Criteria*

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§1. Anti-realism of the sort which Michael Dummett has expounded¹ takes issue with the traditional idea that an understanding of any statement (here, declarative sentence) is philosophically correctly analysed as involving grasp of conditions necessary and sufficient for its truth. Many kinds of statement to which, as we ordinarily think, we attach a clear sense would have to be represented, according to this tradition, as possessing *verification-transcendent* truth-conditions; if true that is to say, they would be so in virtue of circumstances of a type transcending our range of possible awareness. Exactly where to draw the boundaries of our possible awareness might be controversial; but there is clearly no being aware, in the relevant sense, of the kind of state of affairs which would make true a generalization of theoretical physics, an assertion about James II weight on his twenty-eighth birthday, a claim about what would have happened if Edward Heath had not sought a fresh mandate during the miners' strike, or—from your point of view—the statement that my left ear aches. In each of these kinds of case the traditional view, while granting that we (or you) cannot experience the truth-conferring states of affairs as such, would nevertheless credit us with a clear conception of the type of thing they would be. To be sure, there is then no possibility of a straightforward construal of this conception as a recognitional capacity. But the traditional view tends to conceal from itself the problematic status which the alleged grasp of truth-conditions therefore assumes by working with the picture that the 'conception' is *indirectly* recognitional, that it *issues in* a cluster of unproblematic recognitional capacities; in particular, the ability to recognize what is or is not good evidence for the relevant statement and the ability to recognize its logical relations to other statements.²

Now, what the anti-realist urges that we enquire is: what good reason is

¹ I do not mean to imply that Dummett's exposition has remained uniform throughout his writings. The principal sources are the articles reprinted as chapters 1, 10, 11, 13, 14, 21 in the collection of his papers, *Truth and other Enigmas* (Duckworth, 1978), and 'What is a Theory of Meaning? (II)' in *Truth and Meaning*, Evans and McDowell (eds) (Oxford University Press, 1976). See also *Frege: Philosophy of Language* (Duckworth, 1973), *passim*.

² See, for example, Strawson, 'Scruton and Wright on Anti-realism, etc.', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* (1976).

there to postulate any such ulterior 'conception' from which these abilities are supposed to flow—why, indeed, describe our understanding of these statements as involving knowledge of truth-conditions at all? His challenge to the realist is to make out a respectable notion of explanation in terms of which the truth-conditional account can be seen to be needed in order to explain these recognitional abilities. And his suspicion is that the challenge cannot be met.

If this suspicion is correct, the traditional truth-conditional account actually conveys, at least in the case of verification-transcendent statements, no substantial philosophical insight into what understanding essentially is. However, an account which, it seems, cannot possibly be open to objection in the same way would *identify* understanding with the cluster of abilities of which the truth-conditional view aimed to provide a unified explanation. Understanding a statement, on this view, would simply be a matter of practical mastery of all aspects of its *use*.

If a statement has truth-conditions whose actualization is something which our experience can encompass, then part of this practical mastery will be the ability to recognize such an actualisation, if one is appropriately placed to do so, and to respond accordingly; in such a case, knowledge of the truth-conditions will be a sub-species of knowledge of the conditions which warrant assertion of the statement—its *assertibility-conditions*. But it is now a grasp of assertibility-conditions which, for statements in general, will play the central role in the account of understanding. Such grasp can play this central role because, first, a practical knowledge of the logical relations of a statement is simply a knowledge of the role played in its assertibility-conditions by possible argumentation; and because, second, whether there is what the traditional account would regard merely as good evidence for a particular statement is something which—unlike whether or not it is true—a reasonable man can *always* recognize, which can never be transcendent. The thought is, in short, that understanding a statement is essentially a practical, discriminatory skill of which knowledge of assertibility-conditions is always, while knowledge of truth-conditions is at most sometimes, a satisfactory interpretation.

An endorsement of this assertibility-conditions conception of meaning is taken by Dummett, I believe rightly, to be part of the intent of the later Wittgenstein's identification of (knowledge of) meaning with (knowledge of) use. It is therefore natural to wonder what if any part ought to be played in a theory which elaborates the assertibility-conditions conception by the notion of a *criterion* deployed in Wittgenstein's later work. That is the main question which I want to consider: if we find ourselves in sympathy with the anti-realist's criticisms, and are led thereby to seek a philosophical account of meaning in which conditions of warranted assertion rather than of truth play the central role, ought we to try to substantiate and utilize something at least interestingly akin to Wittgenstein's notion?

§2. In the *Blue Book*, as is familiar, Wittgenstein does not always sharply distinguish the concept of a criterion from that of a sufficient—or even a necessary and sufficient—condition of a statement's truth. (See, notoriously, the passage about Angina on p. 25.) But the use which Wittgenstein makes of the notion both elsewhere in the *Blue Book* and throughout the *Investigations* make it plain that he did not in general intend that satisfaction of the criteria of a statement should be the same thing as realization of truth-conditions. Consider for example *Investigations*, 377:

What are the criteria for the redness of an image? For me, when it is someone else's image, what he says and does . . .

But Wittgenstein explicitly disavows the behaviourism which would hold that the truth-conditions of 'X is experiencing a red image', said of another, are constituted by his verbal and non-verbal behaviour.³ Compare 354:

The fluctuation in grammar between criteria and symptoms makes it look as though there were nothing at all but symptoms. We say, for example: 'Experience teaches that there is rain when the barometer falls but it also teaches that there is rain when we have certain sensations of wet and cold or such-and-such visual impressions'. In defence of this one says that these sense-impressions can deceive us. But here one fails to reflect that the fact that the false appearance is precisely-one of rain is founded on a definition.

The criteria of a statement, as Wittgenstein intends the notion, are, first and most importantly, in contrast with its symptoms, conditions which justify its assertion as a matter of 'definition'—as a function purely of its meaning—but which fall short of making it true. We can add that if the statement has a communally well-understood use, as Wittgenstein argued any genuine statement must, the conditions in question must, secondly, be *publicly accessible*. And Wittgenstein stresses, thirdly, that the criteria of a statement are generally *multiple*; see, for example, *Blue Book*, p. 51, on the multiplicity of criteria for statements about the perceivable world; *Brown Book*, 7, p. 144, on the multiplicity of criteria for someone's sincerity; *Investigations*, 164, for the case of reading, and many other passages.

Both Hacker⁴ and Baker⁵ take it to be an essential fourth feature of Wittgenstein's notion that the satisfaction of criteria confers *certainty*. Naturally, this cannot be so if we regard as certain only statements about which the possibility of error can be definitively excluded. But if certainty is taken to apply to all and only statements which may not reasonably be doubted, then—since what may reasonably be asserted cannot simul-

³ For any agnostic about this claim, *Investigations* 393 should be explicit enough.

⁴ In *Insight and Illusion* (Oxford University Press, 1972), concluding chapter.

⁵ In 'Criteria: a New Foundation for Semantics', *Ratio* (1974).

taneously be reasonably doubted—the satisfaction of a statement's criteria will indeed pre-empt any reasonable doubt about it; for it will now be part of the *content* of the statement that it may reasonably be asserted in those circumstances. (Classical scepticism therefore presupposes something other than a criterial account of meaning; it requires an account which makes it coherent to call into question our warrant to assert a particular kind of statement in all the kinds of circumstances which we typically consider to justify its assertion without *eo ipso* calling into question the identity of the statement. The truth-conditional account will generally serve the sceptic's purpose admirably.)

§3. A natural thought is that the assertibility-conditions theorist will need to avail himself of something at least very close to Wittgenstein's distinction of criteria from conditions of warranted assertion in general if he is to give an account of what it is to *misunderstand* a statement. If somebody uses a statement in what seems to the rest of us a quite aberrant manner, factual misapprehension, prejudice and simple ignorance are among the most likely explanations. But another possibility, as we should ordinarily suppose, is that he doesn't understand the statement. The traditional view would mark this difference by drawing a distinction between aberrant uses which respectively do and do not flow from a misconception of a statement's truth-conditions. But it looks to be unclear what account an anti-realist can give of the distinction so long as he is content to talk vaguely of understanding a statement as consisting in a practical knowledge of its assertibility-conditions; for the ignorant, mistaken or prejudiced man, after all, does in one way not know the assertibility-conditions of the statement of which his use is aberrant. If assertibility-conditions are divided into criteria and symptoms, on the other hand, then the anti-realist can propose that aberrant use betrays misunderstanding when and only when it is caused by misconceptions about, or ignorance of, the criteria for the statement in question.

Now, it is clear that, whatever else it may achieve, this proposal does not of itself convey a full account of misunderstanding. Saying that a misunderstanding consists in misconceptions about, or ignorance of, criteria is no more an account of the notion than saying that it consists in misconceptions about, or ignorance of, truth-conditions. In both cases we continue to await an explanation of how such a misconception is supposed to be manifest *as such* in a person's behaviour. Talk in terms of criteria, or truth-conditions, puts us in a position to *label* the notion of misunderstanding; and our desire to have such a label has whatever respectability the belief possesses that no satisfactory philosophy of language will be able to jettison the notion of misunderstanding altogether. But the fact is that to introduce the idea of aberrant usage which is attributable to misconceptions about, or ignorance of, criteria really makes it not one whit clearer

how to provide a substantial account of misunderstanding: it merely serves to include provision of one on the (already packed) agenda.

This objection is reinforced if we look a little closer at the question how a substantial account might run. From whatever standpoint it emanated, it is clear that the account would have to respect the *holistically interlocking* character of the key concepts in the system whereby we explain a person's linguistic performance. In order to make his willingness to assent to, or dissent from, a particular statement in particular circumstances intelligible to us, we need to come up with hypotheses about his desires, beliefs, and the manner in which he understands the statement. But his performance will be good evidence for any particular one of these hypotheses only against the background of the other two. (The same point applies, of course, to the simpler system of belief and desire in terms of which we interpret non-linguistic human behaviour. A person's behaviour will support a particular hypothesis about his desires only if we presuppose certain beliefs on his part about how he can achieve those desires and about the prevailing circumstances; conversely, we can support the claim that he has certain beliefs only if we are allowed to presuppose certain desires on his part.) We do not require a more refined account of this sort of holistic structure of explanation to appreciate the corollary that there is no behaviour which is absolutely distinctive, of and by itself, of a misunderstanding of a particular statement. Whatever someone does, he can be acquitted of the charge of misunderstanding if we are ready to plead his possession of suitably idiosyncratic desires or factual beliefs; in fact, there will be *no end* of explanations of his behaviour available to us none of which involves attribution of any misunderstanding. So a full account of the notion of misunderstanding must do no less than tackle the complex question: what makes an explanation in terms of misunderstanding preferable to one of another kind, given the freedom that the holistic character of this system of explanation in principle affords us?

One possibility, certainly, is that the assertibility-conditions theorist will have to invoke the notion of a criterion in order to answer that question; that, for example, responses to situations in which arguable criteria for a statement are realized are particularly important in determining our preferences concerning what sort of explanation to give of an aberrant use of it. But, in advance, there seems no very clear reason for expecting this to be so. It may be that wholly pragmatic considerations govern our preferences here; considerations, that is to say, which have to do solely with how powerful and manageable an overall theory of the individual's behaviour the contrasted explanations admit of integration into—our preference being, for example, to describe someone as misunderstanding only when a large *range* of aberrant usage can be elicited from him in which certain expressions recur of which we can furnish an interpretation sanctioning a large part of the range.

Where that was the situation, we should expect, *ceteris paribus*, that patient re-explanation of the meanings of the relevant expressions, with perhaps a special eye towards ruling out the deviant interpretation in question, would bring our miscreant into line. And it will be, of course, in general a crucial element in our preferences about what kind of account to offer of aberrant use of a statement just what kind of 'further education' we anticipate will serve to eliminate it—explanations of meanings, or adduction of empirical fact, or neither. This reflection, however, provides a reason for supposing that the assertibility-conditions theorist will need to invoke criteria if he is to account for the notion of misunderstanding only if it is already assumed that he will need to invoke criteria in order to make good the distinction between explaining meanings and calling attention to empirical facts. And that assumption is correct only if at least some explanations of meaning are distinguished as such precisely by serving to elucidate criteria for the correct use of certain statements. If *that* were clear, however, we should already have sufficient reason for supposing that an assertibility-conditions orientated philosophy of language ought to utilize Wittgenstein's notion; special consideration of misunderstanding would be a detour.

There is at any rate, as it seems to me, no easy path from the assumption that such a philosophy of language ought to provide an account of the notion of misunderstanding to the conclusion that it will need to distinguish among assertibility-conditions between those which are criterial and those which are merely symptomatic in status. That is not to say that there may not be a harder path.

§4. Let us experiment with the following *Criterial Schema*:

If an agent has verified each of $\{D_1, \dots, D_n\}$, and possesses no information telling against *S* and no information which would explain, without the need to suppose *S*, why $\{D_1, \dots, D_n\}$ are true, then it is reasonable for him to believe *S*.

The Schema is satisfied for any particular statement *S* only by statements $\{D_1, \dots, D_n\}$, which (collectively) describe conditions knowledge of whose realization is capable of justifying assertion of *S*. But as it stands, it embraces certain trivial cases: $\{D_1, \dots, D_n\}$ may, for example, entail *S*; or they may include the statement that it is reasonable to believe *S*, or entail that statement independently of the additional conditions that no information telling against *S*, or equally good alternative explanations of the truth of $\{D_1, \dots, D_n\}$, should be on hand. Let us therefore stipulate, first that $\{D_1, \dots, D_n\}$ all be *decidable* statements; we thereby ensure that whenever *S* is verification-transcendent, knowledge of the truth of $\{D_1, \dots, D_n\}$ will constitute at best a defeasible ground for asserting *S*, and will moreover be knowledge of an unproblematic recognitional sort (provided, of course, it is right to suppose that knowledge of the truth-conditions of decidable

statements is correctly so regarded⁶). And let us also stipulate, second, that $\{D_1, \dots, D_n\}$ are to be *S-predicative* statements: that is, statements which involve in particular no occurrences of *S* and, more generally, an understanding of which presupposes no understanding of *S*; we thereby ensure both that the second and, I believe also, the third trivial kinds of case are excluded, and, most importantly, that any $\{D_1, \dots, D_n\}$ which satisfies the Schema for a particular *S* is suitable material for a non-circular explanation of the assertibility conditions of *S*—for, from the point of view of the assertibility-conditions theorist, it obviously has to be possible to explain *S*'s assertibility-conditions without presupposing that the recipient already understands *S*.

To locate a set, $\{D_1, \dots, D_n\}$, which, for a particular *S*, satisfies the Schema, understood—as from here on we shall understand it—as so restricted, would not yet be fully to explain the use of *S*; full explanation would at least require, in addition, an *S*-predicative account of what it was to have no information telling against *S*, nor any competitive alternative explanation of the truth of $\{D_1, \dots, D_n\}$. Nevertheless it appears that we can now formulate our leading question in rather sharper terms: is the assertibility-conditions theorist committed to holding that, if *S* is a well-understood verification-transcendent statement, a set, $\{D_1, \dots, D_n\}$, can be located whose introduction with *S* into the Schema will result in a *non-contingent* truth? If so, then for each such *S*, he will be constrained to acknowledge a set of conditions which can be explained independently of an understanding of *S* and of which it is non-contingently true that their satisfaction defeasibly warrants *S*'s assertion. That would surely be a commitment to something 'interestingly akin to' Wittgenstein's notion, even though the proposal does not speak directly to Wittgenstein's conditions concerning the publicity and variety of criterial support.

In order to try to clarify the matter, let us suppose the opposite: that there are verification-transcendent statements of whose assertibility-conditions we can, perhaps, give a general, though impredicative, description but of which no more specific, predicative description can be given generating a non-contingent instance of the Schema. For any such statement, *S*, we then confront two possibilities: either (i) such *S*-predicative characterizations as can be given of *S*'s assertibility-conditions yield contingent instances of the Schema; or (ii) no *S*-predicative characterization can be given at all. The question which it is now fruitful to consider is: how are the kind of circumstances which justify assertion of *S* to be conceived as initially communicable? On alternative (i), it appears that an explanation could at least begin by reference to an *S*-predicative description, *C*, of features, E_1, \dots, E_k , of certain such circumstances. But it would be *contingent* that the circumstances so described ever justified

⁶ A question to be aired in §7 of this paper.

assertion of S—so before one could reasonably offer this sort of explanation, it would be necessary to have empirical grounds supporting it; empirical grounds for supposing that the appropriate instances of the Schema were (contingently) true. Evidently, in order to be in possession of such grounds, we should have to have had some anterior idea of *other* features, F_1, \dots, F_k , which would distinguish (at least some) circumstances justifying assertion of S. For unless we had some such idea, capable of elucidation in advance, it would be impossible to defend against the suggestion that we did *not* find empirical grounds for regarding C-type circumstances as justifying assertion of S but rather tacitly adopted a *convention* that they did so—contrary to (i). So the question now arises, in what manner is this anterior idea to be thought of as capable of explanation? Perhaps the relevant features, F_1, \dots, F_k , can be S-predicatively characterized; but in that case, given (i), it will be contingent whether circumstances which exemplify them justify assertion of S, so the explanation given will in turn require empirical support. And, again, we shall be able to adduce such support only within the framework of yet other features, G_1, \dots, G_k , regarded as distinguishing assertibility-conditions of S. Clearly, however, *these* features must not be those features, E_1, \dots, E_k , originally specified in C—otherwise our putative empirical grounds for regarding C-circumstances as justifying assertion of S become circular. So we embark on a regress.

The position, in other words, is that if we are allowed recourse *only* to S-predicative descriptions of assertibility-conditions of S, then alternative (i) requires that in order to be entitled to regard our explanation as correct, we shall need to establish empirical support for infinitely many independent such descriptions—*per impossibile*. That is, if it is possible to give an S-predicative characterization of assertibility-conditions of S which we are entitled to regard as correct, the case for saying so will have to advert to something other than an S-predicative characterization.

Notice, however, that for the assertibility-conditions theorist it must not be *unavoidable* for us to invoke an S-impredicative characterization at this point. For knowing S's assertibility-conditions is to involve more than grasping that certain types of circumstance justify its assertion—it is to involve attaining all the understanding of S which we, the trainers, enjoy. So if C-type circumstances merely contingently justify assertion of S, one thing the trainee has to learn is *why*—by what principle—they are rightly judged to do so. But if we really cannot avoid bringing in reference to an S-impredicative characterization of S's assertibility-conditions in order to defend the correctness of C, then there cannot be any explanation of this principle intelligent receipt of which does not presuppose a prior understanding of S—and that is just to say that there is no full explanation of what it is for circumstances to justify the assertion of S save one which presupposes an understanding of S, an absurd situation from the point of view of the assertibility-conditions theorist.

The consequences of alternative (i) for the assertibility-conditions theorist are therefore as follows. In order to be entitled to regard any S-predicative description as characterizing a class of circumstances which justify S's assertion, we shall need to advert to features which we *cannot* capture by S-predicative description but which *can* be explained without recourse to S-impredicative description. Only someone who is apprised of these features and their role understands S; so no S-impredicative description of them is of any explanatory use. S's assertibility-conditions, alternative (i) therefore forces us to conclude, do not admit of a complete descriptive explanation.

If, on the other hand, as supposed on alternative (ii), it is somehow the case that no S-predicative characterization can be given at all of features distinctive of S's assertibility-conditions, the same conclusion swiftly follows. Now the only characterizations of S's assertibility-conditions which we will be entitled to regard as correct will all be S-impredicative; whereas if such a characterization is to be genuinely explanatory, it will have to be possible to presuppose on the part of its recipient a prior understanding of S, conferred in some other way than by a characterization of its assertibility-conditions. The truth-conditional conception has at least *scope* for such a presupposition; the requisite prior understanding of S will have been conferred by exactly an explanation of its *truth-conditions*, so there is no formal obstacle to an explanatory but S-impredicative characterization of its assertibility-conditions. But the assertibility-conditions theorist, obviously, has no such scope except in cases where he regards grasp of truth-conditions as unproblematic—contrary to the hypothesized situation of S. It therefore appears that in the case of any well-understood verification-transcendent statement he must either reject *both* alternatives, (i) and (ii), or else embrace their common consequence (for his point of view) that no description of the statement's assertibility-conditions can be given which is a full and adequate introductory explanation of them. To reject both alternatives, (i) and (ii), however, is just to postulate the existence of non-contingently true instances of the Schema—restricted as described—for the statement in question; that is, *criteria* for it. So we have an affirmative answer to our leading question as one disjunct of the conclusion of the foregoing argument.

§5. The other option is that the theorist discard the idea that a full understanding of S can be imparted by description of its assertibility-conditions. Since, for him, an understanding of S *consists* in grasping its assertibility-conditions, this option immediately necessitates some other model of how a grasp of S's assertibility-conditions can be conferred. The only other form for a model to take is, of course—using the word in its broadest possible sense—*ostensive*: it has to be possible to make manifest what type of conditions justify the assertion of S by demonstration and example.

Granted the soundness of the reasoning of the preceding section, the situation is therefore that an assertibility-conditions theorist is committed to elucidating criteria for any verification-transcendent statement, *S*, whose sense he considers to be well-determined but whose assertibility-conditions he considers could not be explained ostensively.

It might be thought that, bearing in mind that we learn the overwhelmingly greater part of our language by direct immersion, as it were, the demand on the assertibility-conditions theorist actually to spell out criteria is one which it will hardly ever be possible to make stick. Confidence in the correctness of that thought ought to await an investigation how it could be made apparent, *purely* by ostension, demonstration and example, under what circumstances past-tense, or unrestrictedly general, assertions—to take two potentially problematic-looking cases—were justifiably assertible. But even if the thought is correct, we still need to consider, before concluding that no reason is apparent for supposing that an assertibility-conditions theorist will have much work for criteria, whether even within the class of assertibility-conditions whose explanation does proceed, in the relevant broad sense, in purely ostensive terms, something ‘interestingly akin to’ the distinction between criteria and symptoms can still be explained.

It is natural to think that the answer must be negative. For the distinction as so far understood turns on whether a state of affairs of a particular type justifies assertion of a particular *S* contingently or non-contingently. And how can that issue so much as make sense if the type of state of affairs in question is associated with no particular description but is identified by ostensive means? All that can settle the question of contingency or non-contingency, it might be thought, is consideration of the meanings of *S* and of the description given of the type of state of affairs in question. So where, in the relevant sense, *no* description is given, the question cannot arise. Or if it does arise, some radically *de re* conception of contingency/non-contingency seems to be required to give it content.

Surely, though, of *any* explanation of assertibility-conditions of *S*, descriptive or ostensive, it has to make sense to enquire whether it admits of an empirical defence. If the community considers that a certain sort of state of affairs, of which they can give no better than an incompletely descriptive, largely ostensive characterization justifies asserting *S*, it ought to be a reasonable enquiry what, if any, type of ground they have for thinking so. Three possibilities then open. The first is that they consider that they have empirical grounds; as when, for example, a particular behavioural syndrome, visually distinctive but difficult distinctively to describe, has been found to be associated with a particular kind of poisoning. Second, they may find that they are unable to adduce such grounds, and tend to treat that as calling into question the correctness of asserting *S* in that type of circumstance. Or, third, they may be disinclined to respond to their lack of empirical grounds in that way and, very likely,

puzzled to know what to do to meet the demand for justification of this aspect of their practice. Obviously, it is this third possibility which is of interest in the present context. It is a possibility which it is certain would in actual practice be realized repeatedly. But the question is how to elicit a respectable notion of *convention* of such a sort that we can then regard communal responses of the third kind as possible indications that the association between the assertibility of the relevant statement and the obtaining of an instance of the ostensibly explained species of circumstances is a conventional matter.

The obvious proposal is simply this: the connection between the occurrence of a particular ostensibly explained type of state of affairs and a particular statement, S, is one of *conventional support* if and only if we would consider it acceptable in certain circumstances to assert S on the basis of knowledge of such a state of affairs; and we would not require, in order for someone to be credited with a full understanding both of S and of what type of state of affairs had been ostensibly explained, that he know what it would be empirically to investigate whether occurrences of that type of state of affairs really did provide reason for believing S and to find that they did not.

In contrast, the connection is one of *contingent support* if and only if we would, once again, consider it acceptable in certain circumstances to assert S on the basis of knowledge of such a state of affairs; but would regard no one as fully understanding both the statement and what kind of state of affairs had been meant *unless* he grasped how it might be empirically investigated whether occurrences of the latter provided reason for believing the former and what it would be for it to turn out that they did not. If, for example, we give an ostensive demonstration of the syndrome of movements characteristic of mercuric poisoning, no one will be credited with a full understanding both of what kind of state of affairs we intended to demonstrate and of the statement, 'X is suffering from mercuric poisoning', unless he has some idea of what it would be empirically to investigate whether occurrences of that syndrome provided a reason for believing appropriate statements of that kind, and what it would be for it to turn out that they did not.

Let us say that a particular type of state of affairs is a **criterion* for a particular statement if and only if it affords that statement conventional support in the sense just described. Truth-conditions, clearly, where, if anywhere, they are capable of ostensive explanation, are a sub-class of **criteria* so characterized. Our question now is: will an assertibility-conditions theorist who is ready to grant that a particular class of verification-transcendent statements possess no criteria be committed to their possession of **criteria* instead?

Consider what sort of model the theorist is in a position to give of how an understanding of any one member of the class, S, is to be conferred if he

tries to proceed without recourse to **criteria*. By hypothesis, he has abandoned the hope of elucidating criteria for S. So the materials at his disposal include only S-predicatively characterizable but symptomatic assertibility-conditions of S and ostensibly explicable but merely contingently S-supportive states of affairs. The most immediate difficulty, as before, has to do with the defensibility of whatever explanation he chooses to advance. It has to do, that is to say, with how he can support the claim that his explanation enjoins *correct* use of S. For whatever type of explanation, ostensive or descriptive, which his model involves will connect only contingently with the justifiable use of S—will be such that competent members of his speech community will have a concept of how the adequacy of the explanation might be investigated empirically and of how it might turn out to be doubtful. If the explanation is ostensive, the point follows directly from the definition of contingent support; if the explanation is descriptive, it follows from the contingency, ergo possible falsity, of the appropriate instance of the Schema, the possibility interpreted—as an anti-realist must interpret it—constructively. So, either way, in order to provide a defence of the model explanation, the theorist will have to provide a reason for thinking that such an investigation would turn out favourably. In fact, though, it is clear that the most he will be able to provide will be reason for thinking that his explanation enjoins the same pattern of use as another, antecedently accepted as correct. And since this in turn can, by hypothesis, only be an ostension of contingently supportive circumstances or a predicative description of symptoms, the issue of *its* defensibility will immediately arise. Failing recourse to criteria or **criteria*, then, the theorist lands himself in the incoherent position of having to grant that there is an empirical question about the adequacy of any particular explanation of the use of S into which no *effective* (i.e. finite, non-circular and persuasive) investigation can be conducted.

To be sure, that is a predicament which the truth-conditions theorist might be prepared to tolerate. He might be prepared to accept that it is an empirical issue whether the grounds which we standardly accept for asserting a particular type of verification-transcendent statement are indeed a good indication that its transcendent conditions of truth are realized—it is just that the appropriate ‘empirical investigation’ is one which mere human beings cannot perform. But the only coherent stance for the anti-realist assertibility-conditions theorist is to postulate, for any communally well-understood verification-transcendent statement, S, the possibility of an explanation of its assertibility-conditions which, if ostensive, is associated with no communal conception of how its adequacy might be empirically investigated; or, if descriptive, results in a non-contingent instance of the Schema.

The same conclusion emerges another way if we draw on another of our earlier reflections and recall that, while the meaning of S is now viewed

as being fully explained by fully explaining its assertibility-conditions, no one will count as fully understanding S whose responses to what we consider to be contingently S-supportive or S-symptomatic circumstances are more or less what we think of as the right ones but who had no conception of how it might be empirically investigated, and confirmed or disconfirmed, whether we are right. So the assertibility-conditions theorist must provide in his model a way of communicating such a conception; and it is clear that so long as his model makes play only with contingently supportive and symptomatic circumstances, the problem will be intractable. For no matter what lengths the model goes to, no matter how specification of assertibility-conditions is piled on specification, if, for each combination of the circumstances explained, the thesis that its realization would provide reason for believing S is in principle empirically defeasible, no one has fully grasped the meaning of S who has not grasped what it would be for that possibility to be realized—and that is something which the model itself cannot have made clear. A full understanding of S, therefore, if it is to be conferrable by an explanation of assertibility-conditions at all, has to be conceived as involving a knowledge of criteria, or **criteria*, or both.

It should be stressed that what has been established, assuming the soundness of these considerations, is the theorist's commitment to the existence of assertibility-conditions, for each statement for which he regards the truth-conditional account as problematic, of which there is no communal conception how they might be found *not* to provide reason for believing the statement. A full understanding of the statement, that is to say, will be required to involve grasp of the role of these conditions; but it will not be required to involve grasp that their status is susceptible to empirical investigation. Something *weaker* is therefore being said than that each such statement will be associated with assertibility-conditions for which there is a communal understanding that their status as such is *not* susceptible to empirical investigation. Critics of the Wittgensteinian notion⁷ are usually realists holding, more or less consciously, the truth-conditional view; but they also tend to labour under the belief that the proponent of criteria is confronting them with some such strong notion. And the fact is that lots of *prima facie* examples of the weaker kind of thing tend not to be clear-cut examples of the stronger. I suggest, however, though I shall not attempt to argue the point here, that play with a notion of the weaker kind will subserve well enough the *Investigations* strategy with traditional forms of scepticism; and that Wittgenstein's talk of the 'fluctuation between

⁷ See most notably Putnam, 'Brains and Behaviour' in *Analytical Philosophy*, Butler (ed.), second series (Blackwell, 1965); also Chihara and Fodor, 'Operationalism and Ordinary Language: a Critique of Wittgenstein', *American Philosophical Quarterly* (1965).

criteria and symptoms'⁸—an idea crucial to his diagnosis of the way in which the sceptics's ideas are able to take hold of us—is correctly interpreted as pointing in particular to the phenomenon whereby it can at one time be no part of understanding a certain statement to know what it would be empirically to investigate whether a particular kind of state of affairs, standardly taken to justify its assertion, really does so but at a later time essential to have a conception of just such an investigation. That some such thing has happened to, for example, statements identifying samples of the elements between the era of the alchemists and the present day seems clear enough; and that it reflects a change in concepts like 'gold' is also clear, since the requirements imposed on a full understanding of these concepts have changed. But whether the point is correctly interpreted as somehow compromising the continuity of the objects of scientific enquiry is quite another matter.

§6. A major area of enquiry opens up at this point. If the assertibility-conditions theorist is committed to finding either criteria or *criteria for every communally well-understood statement for which he finds the truth-conditional account unacceptable, then if ever reason can be given for doubting that either criteria or *criteria can be found in a relevant class of cases, that will tend to suggest that there is something amiss with the assertibility-conditions conception of statement meaning; and that in turn will pose the question whether anti-realism can succeed in proposing any defensible alternative to the truth-conditional view. How far, then, can the assertibility-conditions theorist meet this apparent commitment?

The question is too big for this lecture. But let me at least make some rather cursory remarks about one central problematic case: that of statements about the past. An immediate reaction would be that the case looks promising for the anti-realist; for is it not most implausible to suppose that our apparent memories, or the possession of historical documentation, merely contingently provide reason for believing such statements? Is it not out of the question to suppose that a conditional like:

If we all seem to recollect that S, and possess no countervailing evidence, nor any other explanation, equally as good as the supposition that S, of our possession of such an apparent memory, then it is reasonable for us to believe that S,

although, as we should ordinarily suppose, true, could in principle turn out to be incorrect if certain contingencies were realised? No doubt an appropriate genre of *scepticism* would contest the truth of such a conditional; but it would do so on purely *a priori* grounds. And a philosopher who is not

⁸ In addition to the *Investigations* passage quoted above, see also *Zettel* 438.

prepared to don the mantle of sceptic about the past, and who can adduce no plausible account of *what* contingent facts would have to change in order for such a conditional to cease to be true, seems to have no alternative to admitting that statements about the past are capable of defeasible but non-contingent support.

Even if the conditional is indeed a non-contingent truth, however, as a prospective indication of a source of criteria, in the sense in which we are interested, for statements about the past, it is, obviously, uselessly S-impredicative. It may well be true that apparent memory enters into some sort of non-contingent connection with the reasonableness of certain kinds of belief about the past; but there will be no milking criteria out of the connection unless an S-predicative characterization can be given of what it is to have an apparent memory that S, and a characterization, moreover, whose correctness in any particular state of affairs is a decidable matter. The prospect of doing so, however, looks very opaque: what distinctive but essential features *are* there of an apparent memory that S which could be captured by descriptions presupposing no understanding of S and whose collective realization would *constitute* an apparent memory that S? Nothing plausible comes into view; and the corresponding question about historical documentation looks, for its part, no less daunting.

Memory and documentation apart, our judgments concerning past events and states of affairs rely entirely upon more or less theoretically inspired beliefs concerning their presently accessible physical traces. That no such traces can enjoy the status of criteria seems to be settled by the simple reflection that their provision of a reason for believing a particular past-tense statement will always be contingent *either* on the outcome of a direct appeal to documentation or memory *or* on the degree of empirical support possessed by the theory which credits them with that status—itsself a contingent matter. So the criteria, if there are any, for past-tense statements must, it seems, be sought in the areas of apparent memory and documentation. If, therefore, the suspicion is correct that none save S-impredicative characterizations of apparent memories and documentation will serve to generate non-contingent instances of the Schema for a past-tense statement, S, we must conclude that there are no criteria for statements about the past.

It appears, then, that the assertibility-conditions theorist must make a case for regarding apparent memory and/or documentation as possible sources of **criteria* for past-tense statements; and part of the case will have to be to argue that it is possible to explain ostensively, without presupposing an understanding of S, what it is for one to seem to remember that S or to have documentation that S.

In the case of documentation, it seems to be plain that little headway can be made. No doubt we could ostensively train someone to recognize written, or spoken, occurrences of the statement (that is to say, remember,

declarative sentence); but only a language-user could tell whether it was meant to be received as having been asserted or not—and, besides, the knowledge that others, dead or alive, assert the statement is next to useless as a clue to its content. Knowledge of the **criteria* of a statement ought to confer a *non-parastic* knowledge of its correct assertoric use; so the kind of non-contingent connection which documentation, and hearsay in general, has with reasonable belief is of no help to the theorist here.

The crucial question is therefore: could we make intelligible to someone by, in the relevant broad sense, ostensive means, what it was for him to seem to remember that S without in any way presupposing a prior understanding of S on his part? One's first suspicion is: no. Obviously, it is possible for us to drill someone in a broadly ostensive way in the correct use of a particular statement only if we are in a position to know in what way, from situation to situation, he *ought* to use it. But, it is plausible to suppose, someone's apparent memories are a feature of his mental life of a kind of which, in contrast to many sensations and emotions, there is no distinctive behavioural manifestation *save* his report of them. So if, as is our hypothesis, someone is in no position to report his apparent memory that S, how can it be determined how the envisaged drill should proceed? How are we supposed to know what someone's apparent memories are, if he is not in a position to tell us? And how, therefore, could we drill him in their correct description?

If there are neither criteria nor **criteria* for past-tense statements, then, assuming the soundness of the reasoning of the preceding sections, it cannot be correct to view our understanding of such statements as consisting in knowledge of their assertibility-conditions. But we only have a *prima facie* case for that conclusion—and one to which the assertibility-conditions theorist is by no means bereft of a reply. He could point out, to begin with, that it is not as if a man's linguistically mature descriptions of his apparent memories are granted an absolutely unchallengeable authority. We often have a fairly definite idea when to expect someone to seem to remember something; and a fairly definite idea, too, of what it is to have a reasonable suspicion that someone is lying, or even sincerely mistaken, in claiming to seem to remember something. And if there are public standards for the correctness of apparent memory reports, ought it not to be possible to guide the envisaged ostensive training by these standards? After all, correct use of statements concerning one's own past is something in which most of us have been successfully trained simply by immersion within a linguistic community, something which we have learnt purely by example, prompting and correction. This training, somehow or other, gets across to us the distinction between making such statements on the basis of apparent memory and making them on other grounds. It helps to imagine our own practice changed in the following respect: we now never make, as it were, unguarded assertions about our past but

always explicitly acknowledge the type of ground which we have for them: 'I am told that I was very angry', 'I seem to remember being very angry', 'I guess I must have been very angry', and so on. This new practice involves making no assertions in circumstances in which it would not have been correct to assert them before; so it could not be any more difficult to learn from scratch. Since its mastery, in contrast with mastery merely of the past tense, involves *explicit* knowledge of what it is to have apparent memories, surely there is no alternative to supposing that such knowledge is capable of ostensive communication.

This reply is more of a strong protest than a strong argument. I shall not try to take the matter any further here. The foregoing is at least a preliminary illustration of the way in which our leading question has a wider bearing than on the issue, interesting enough in itself, how Dummett's anti-realism connects with the ideas of the later Wittgenstein.

§7. We have so far been considering the role of criteria/**criteria* in an assertibility-conditions account of the meanings of verification-transcendent statements. In this final section I want briefly to consider the assumption that an anti-realist need have no quarrel with a truth-conditional view of the meanings of decidable ones.

If, as in Hacker⁹ and Baker,¹⁰ the criterial relation is regarded as holding between statements, then an anti-realist who held that the meaning of *every* statement is determined by its association with criteria would commit himself to an impossible model of how an understanding of any statement could be acquired. When the criterial relation is so understood, therefore, a criterial theory of meaning cannot be a global theory of meaning; a base class of statements is required whose meaning is not determined by association with criteria, and the obvious strategy for finding it is to see whether, or how far, the truth-conditional conception can be regarded as unproblematic from an anti-realist point of view.

How should the idea of an (effectively) decidable mathematical statement best be generalized? The obvious proposal is simply to replace the notions of proof and disproof in the mathematical characterization by more general ones of verification and falsification. An (effectively) decidable statement would then be any statement for which (we can recognize in advance that) we have a finite procedure whose implementation will culminate in its verification or falsification.

In terms of this proposal, perhaps the most immediate contingent candidates for the status of effective decidability would be statements which concerned presently observable characteristics of particulars which we can presently effectively find and identify; or, more generally, which

^{9,10} See works cited above.

concerned finitely surveyable episodes or states of affairs in presently accessible regions of space and time. Thus 'My car is parked on the Scores', 'Tabitha is in her basket' and 'The sea is choppy today' would, making appropriate allowances for context and, where necessary, vagueness, turn out to be effectively decidable in these terms. The decision procedure appropriate in each case is: position yourself in the appropriate situation and observe.

Now, one might worry about what it is for a characteristic to be 'presently observable' or whether the idea of an 'effectively identifiable' particular has any legitimate place in a purported characterization of effective decidability. But the most major complication with the sort of example illustrated is that the role played by the idea of *position* has no counterpart in the mathematical cases from which we are trying to generalize. Anywhere is as good a place as anywhere else to determine whether or not 283 is a prime; and the same goes for time. But observation of the properties of spatio-temporal particulars, or of the goings-on within particular spatio-temporal regions, essentially requires getting oneself into an appropriate spatio-temporal position. Examples of this type, it might be argued, are therefore properly regarded as effectively decidable only if where and when one is itself an effectively decidable question; and it is proper to regard it as such only if we can rightly regard ourselves as having an effective finite procedure for determining where and when we are. But can it plausibly be claimed that we have any such procedure? Consider the case of spatial position on its own. Each of us finds his way around by relating the sequence of his experiences to a complex theoretic 'map' that he carries in his head of how the world is, by and large, disposed to affect his senses in different places. But the sense-affective dispositions of any particular place are, of course in no way *essential* characteristics of it: how the world is at any particular place is something which we conceive to be capable of radical change. The theoretic map which we employ is thus a revisable empirical theory. Granting, then, that there is no effective procedure for settling the truth or falsity of such a theory, and that it is only within the framework which it supplies, that the sort of statement illustrated can be determined to be true or false, how can such statements be regarded as effectively decidable at all? After all, if any statement counts as effectively decidable of which we can recognize that its truth or falsity can be settled within the framework of what is merely a *well-supported* theory, there is likely to be no clear barrier against the effective decidability of many examples of the sort of statement for which the anti-realist finds the notion of truth unacceptably transcendent.

A more general doubt about the propriety of thinking of the sort of statement illustrated as capable of verification pivots on their essential *defeasibility*. For verification ought or so it is natural to think, to be *conclusive*—otherwise there is no difference between data which verify a

statement and data which merely support it. But no matter how sure a statement of the simple observational kind illustrated seems to be, developments are conceivable which may force us to retract it. For in addition to the complications generated by the role of spatio-temporal position, we have to acknowledge also possibilities like illusion and deception, possibilities which in any particular case may always suddenly open up on us.

The obvious thought at this point is that we may merely have picked the wrong type of example. But if there is to be a class of contingent statements about whose status as genuinely (effectively) decidable the above doubts do not apply, then the above sources of defeasibility must not apply either. In the first instance, therefore, their verification must not presuppose that the agent verifies his own spatio-temporal position. So they will have to deal in what is happening *here* and *now*. Secondly, they will have to involve no modes of reference to or description of particulars whose appropriateness turns on presuppositions about their history or future; and this promises to proscribe all proper names, all definite descriptions involving sortal terms—‘man’, ‘tree’, etc. (which always presuppose a certain sort of history); and all predicates, indeed, save ones which can be applied purely on the basis of present observation. But, thirdly, statements can meet these conditions, e.g. ‘something here and now is red’, but still be prone to a further source of defeasibility affecting every categorical assertion, however closely tied to present observation, which we venture about the external world: the possibility of developments which suggest that the conditions of observation are in some way radically *abnormal*. Any characteristic which we might easily take to be purely observational—characteristics, that is, which like colour, or the pitch of a note, or the texture of a surface, can be determined simply by looking, listening, feeling—will be such that a thing can *seem* to have it yet not do so because the conditions of observation somehow disqualify our findings.

It begins to look as though a retreat will be needed to statements concerning how things here and now *seem*. The statement, ‘Something here and now seems to be red’, for example, will not be compromised by the discovery, say, that it is subtly bathed in red light. But defeasibility is not to be shaken off so easily, provided such statements are construed as dealing in publicly accessible facts—provided, that is, the question of how things appear is sharply distinguished from the question of how they appear to any particular individual. For still the requirement of normality of the *observer* remains a source of defeasibility: something can here and now appear red to me, though not appear red *simpliciter*, because I am drugged, or colour-blind, or whatever. Indefeasible verifiability, it appears, is therefore going to require a retreat to description of how things seem to a single observer from his point of view—in short, to *privacy*; for each of us the statements in question will have to concern how things here and now seem to him, irrespective of his state, the conditions of observation, precisely

what particulars of what kinds are within his experiential field, or where and when he is. But the price of taking statements of this kind to be indefeasibly certain will be that the anti-realist, following Wittgenstein's polemic in the *Investigations*, will be constrained to doubt whether we are concerned with a genuinely fact-stating type of statement at all.

It begins to look, at this point, to be only in a 'loose and popular sense', to borrow Butler's phrase,¹¹ that any contingent statement can be regarded as capable of verification. Strictly they are all verification-transcendent; capable of evidential confirmation but as little capable of verification, properly conceived, as Dummett's original examples: 'A city will never be built on this spot' and 'Jones was brave'.¹² And it would, moreover, be a mistake, though one with a long history of attraction, to suppose that the situation is any different with decidable mathematical statements. For:

... one cannot contrast *mathematical* certainty with the relative uncertainty of empirical propositions. For the mathematical proposition has been obtained by a series of actions that are in no way different from the actions of the rest of our lives, and are in the same degree liable to forgetfulness, oversight and illusion (*On Certainty* 651).

If these considerations are correct, then we have to acknowledge that the contrast between any kind of statement which we can verify—whether as the result of implementation of an effective procedure, or by good fortune and/or ingenuity—and verification-transcendent statements is not to be explained, if indeed it can be made out at all, by the susceptibility of the former to indefeasible certainty. Moreover the strategy of trying to construe verifiability merely as a high-grade but defeasible kind of confirmability is certain not to produce a distinction between verifiable and verification-transcendent statements coinciding with what the anti-realist intuitively wants. There are, for example, lots of unrestrictedly general scientific hypotheses, and associated counterfactual conditionals, which have been confirmed to saturation point, so to speak; say, 'All men are mortal'. So is not the class of verifiable contingent statements at best loosely so described and at worst mythical?

The possibility of a negative answer to that question would not compromise a genuine distinction drawn by refinement of the following idea. Some statements, including all decidable mathematical statements, have the feature of being associated with a procedure which it is within human power to implement and which is such that if it is implemented correctly and the agent correctly apprehends what goes on in the course of its implementation, he will thereby have determined whether the statement is true or not.

¹¹ 'The Analogy of Religion'; see *Personal Identity* Perry (ed.) (University of California Press, 1975), 101.

¹² In 'Truth', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* (1958), reprinted as chapter 1 in *Truth and other Enigmas*, cited above.

Effectively decidable statements in general are those of which we can recognize that this is a correct characterization without yet knowing what their truth-value is. Both effectively decidable mathematical statements and the sort of contingent example which we started out considering come under this general rubric. It is just that in neither case can we conclusively, i.e. indefeasibly certainly, verify that the appropriate procedure has been implemented correctly and that we have correctly apprehended the course things took. Moreover, the rubric appears to put in the right place all the standard contingent examples for which the anti-realist urges that we should see problems in the truth-conditional account. There is, for example, no procedure within human compass such that if it is correctly implemented and its whole process correctly apprehended, the truth-value of an unrestricted generalization would *eo ipso* be among the information at one's disposal. The same, plausibly, applies to statements about the past, contingent counterfactual conditionals and statements about others' mental states: the best investigative procedures that we have for these statements are such that, no matter what good luck we enjoy or ingenuity we summon, if we carry them through correctly and correctly apprehend what we have done, we can *still* form an incorrect opinion. To put the matter in terms which an anti-realist would not accept: after implementation of any investigative procedure in these cases, the truth-value of the relevant statement may possibly be at our disposal in the sense that we have managed to form a correct opinion about it; but our investigations will have failed to *determine* the truth-value in the way they do when we are concerned with statements about which an incorrect opinion is possible after implementing the appropriate procedure only if the procedure was botched somehow or we misapprehended the course which things took.

If, however, it is only along these lines¹³ that the contrast between decidable and verification-transcendent statements can be made out, the urgent question is whether it was right for the anti-realist to regard 'grasp of truth-conditions' as a problematic notion only in verification-transcendent cases. His original point was that 'grasp of truth-conditions', knowledge of the distinction between circumstances which make a particular statement true and circumstances which do not, ought to be an ability to *make* a distinction; i.e. to tell the difference. But it is so only when decidable statements are concerned; only then can someone show he has mastered the distinction in the way that fundamentally counts—by applying it directly to the two kinds of circumstances which it divides. For only in the case of decidable statements can truth-conditions be realized within the compass of our experience. But, now, if our best efforts at verification or falsification of decidable statements always remain in principle defeasible,

¹³ For misgivings about this way of drawing the contrast, and an attempt to improve upon it, see §3 of my 'Strict Finitism', forthcoming in *Synthese*.

then in just what sense *are* the truth-conditions of such statements realizable 'within the compass' of our experience? With what justification does the anti-realist credit us with a practical, discriminatory knowledge of truth-conditions in decidable cases but not in verification-transcendent ones if in *both* kinds of case only a defeasible purchase is possible on the facts by reference to which our putative knowledge is to be tested?

Provided defeasibility is, as it seems, absolutely pervasive and ineliminable, it does not in this context matter how (effectively) decidable statements are characterized. For it will remain unclear what the *special* problem about the truth-conditional view of verification-transcendent statements is supposed to be. But it would not follow that the anti-realist ought to suspect error in his original doubts.¹⁴ The logical conclusion for him to draw would be rather that truth-conditional semantics is a distortion right across the board; that everywhere it is at best a mere slogan to think of statement-understanding as consisting in knowledge of truth-conditions. Rather, what it fundamentally consists in, the ability in which it is fully manifest, is just the ability intelligibly to participate in the community's use of its language; the ability to join non-parasitically in a community of assent concerning the justifiability of asserting a particular statement. It is this ability which, whether it is verification-transcendent or decidable, provides the ultimate touchstone of understanding a statement. A recognitional grasp of truth-conditions ought to be testable; and it is testable only by assessment of the agent's responses to situations whereby the truth-conditions are, or are not, realized. But now it is unclear whether that is something which we can ever, strictly speaking, do. All we can do is test his responses to situations in which our best *but defeasible* opinion is that the truth-conditions are, or are not, realized. So his performance is assessed in relation not to how things are but to how we take them to be; and it is in the agent's ability to bear up favourably under this comparison that his understanding of the statement in question resides.

Lest there be any misunderstanding, I do not claim that it is clear that the anti-realist must follow this path, but only that it is at least understandable if he does. We are steering close now to a possible point of contact between anti-realism and the Idealist tradition in philosophy which forms the subject matter of this series of lectures. The essential spirit of the realist philosophical outlook is captured by a three-term picture: whenever (a) I form an opinion, there is (b) the question whether others agree with me and (c) the quite independent question whether I and/or they are right about the matter. All Idealists, whatever other differences there may have been between them, have agreed in holding either that there is no intelligible question (c) or, at least, that it cannot intelligibly be construed as 'quite independent', that how things are is some sort of conceptual function of

¹⁴ Again, however, see 'Strict Finitism', §3.

how human beings take them to be. Now, so long as the anti-realist is content to allow that there is a base class of statements for which the truth-conditional account is appropriate, he has done nothing to cut himself off from realism about any subject matter debatable by the use solely of statements within that class. It will be open to him, that is to say, to endorse the three-term picture as appropriate to any opinion one forms on an issue within such a subject matter. If, in particular, he takes no issue with the truth-conditional view for all effectively decidable statements, then it is open to him—and perhaps required—to endorse the three-term picture for all effectively decidable questions. But if he takes the above considerations to heart and jettisons the idea of a truth-conditionally determined base class of statements, then his contention will have to be that the three-term picture everywhere encourages misdescription of the character of linguistic competence. The realist tries to see competence as a matter of the propensity to suit one's use of statements to correct answers to question (c); but the anti-realist is urging in effect that all that we can *display*, in any case where at most defeasible certainty is possible, is an ability for whose adequate description no acknowledgment of the legitimacy of question (c) is required. So he is within a whisker of Idealism; and he can avoid an idealist stance only if he can somehow argue that question (c), although we do not have to acknowledge it in order to do justice to the character of statement-understanding, has to be acknowledged on other grounds. A leading corollary of the later Wittgenstein's recurrent discussion of rule-following is, I suspect, that the anti-realist cannot coherently develop such an argument. But I will not try to pursue that thought here.¹⁵

We noted that anti-realism cannot coherently suppose that the meaning of every statement is determined by association with criteria. If it cannot coherently look, either, to a truth-conditionally determined base class of statements, there seem to be two remaining possibilities, one remaining within the walls of the assertibility-conditions conception and the other by way of a sortie. The first course would be to look to a base class of statements whose meaning was determined by their association with **criteria*. But of the realization of these **criteria* there would be provision for no other description save by the use of the very statements whose assertion they non-contingently support. There would be, that is to say, no purer description of them whose assertion, over and above being non-contingently justified by them, they actually *made true*; for any attempt to formulate such a description would merely result in something defeasible, an understanding of whose truth-conditions would therefore be, for the anti-realist who has taken this path, an unproductive fiction. Certain passages in Wittgenstein's later work suggest that he may sometimes have had some such idea

¹⁵ See my *Wittgenstein on the Foundations of Mathematics* (Duckworth, 1980), chapters II, XI, and elsewhere *passim*.

as this in mind; e.g. *Zettle* 114–116. But of course the idea cannot be so much as addressed unless we refuse Hacker’s and Baker’s proposed regimentation of Wittgenstein’s equivocal pronouncements about the terms of the criterial relation, and are prepared to countenance the idea that a state of affairs can non-contingently justify a particular assertion in a way which is not parasitic on its description.

That is the first possibility, then: to look to a base class of statements whose meanings are fixed by ostensive training in the conditions which justify their assertion, of which conditions there is, however, no description save by the use of these or other statements for which they are less than truth-conditions. This would be to conceive of the nexus between language and reality as, so to speak, through and through **crititerial*.

The second alternative is to break with the assertibility-conditions conception of meaning and to look to a base class the correct use of whose members, while something on which any opinion is essentially defeasible, is thought of as founded not on the satisfaction of certain external conditions—even if not truth-conferring ones—but in human consensus alone; certain passages in Wittgenstein suggest this idea too (e.g. *On Certainty* 204).¹⁶ And its radical abnegation of the third term of the realist picture means that an anti-realist who takes it will have little justifiable complaint if he is regarded as a neo-Idealist.

¹⁶ I have in mind, also, the ‘Limits of Empiricism’ remarks in the *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*.