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Albrecht Wellmer
Scepticism in Interpretation

1. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* §§ 201 and 219: "What this shews is that there is a way of grasping a rule which is *not* an *interpretation*, but which is exhibited in what we call 'obeying the rule' and 'going against it' in actual cases. Hence there is an inclination to say: every action according to the rule is an interpretation. But we ought to restrict the term "interpretation" to the substitution of one expression of the rule for another.....When I obey a rule, I do not choose. I obey the rule *blindly*."

With these sentences a long series of reflections of Wittgenstein's which at first seemed to lead up to a radically sceptical conclusion, reaches its culminating point. The apparent sceptical conclusion was, that rule-following could only be possible via an infinite process of interpretation, which in the end would imply the impossibility of distinguishing between "right" and "not right" (false, incorrect) and therefore would invalidate the concept of rule-following as such. This conclusion, however, - Wittgenstein says - is the sign of a confusion. "We ought to restrict the term 'interpretation' to the substitution of one expression of the rule for another." (§ 201) Interpretations in this sense are sometimes necessary and helpful, but the comprehension of a rule cannot solely consist in the ability to interpret it in this sense; in the end it can *show* itself only in the practice of applying the rule, i.e. in the *practical* capacity to obey it; and this practical capacity is in an essential sense the capacity to obey the rule "blindly". Wittgenstein had pointed to the aspect of "training" which at first enables us to follow rules; and he shows that rule-following is part of a praxis, of a "language game", of a "form of life". Without this background of a complex praxis, of a "language game", in which verbal and non-verbal activities are intertwined with each other, the concept of rule-following and therefore the distinction between "right" and "false" (incorrect) and together with it the concept of meaning itself would become unintelligible.

Following the two sentences quoted above from § 201 Wittgenstein says in § 202: "And hence also 'obeying a rule' is a practice. And to *think* one is obeying a rule is not to obey a rule. Hence it is not possible to obey a rule 'privately'; otherwise thinking one was obeying a rule would be the same as obeying it." This sentence has divided the Wittgenstein-commentators. Does Wittgenstein say that speaking a language requires a plurality of speakers through which the essential *publicity* of rule-following can only be constituted; or does he only anticipate the results of the so-called Private Language argument (in the

narrower sense of § 258 ff.) I am inclined to follow Kripke and Davidson and others who have argued for the *stronger* thesis – at least in the sense that according to the very logic of Wittgenstein's arguments the stronger thesis should follow. To be sure, I also believe that a sufficient justification of this stronger thesis can be found neither in Wittgenstein nor in Kripke's or Davidson's writings. Such a justification, as far as I can see, would require a more complex network of arguments that cannot be found in the writings of any of the authors I mentioned. Nevertheless I think that Kripke has put forward at least one interesting argument which I shall take up – not primarily to defend a strong version of the PL-argument, but to prepare a distinction which I shall use later on: namely the distinction between a "first-person" and a second-person" understanding of language. With this distinction I aim at a dimension of understanding a language, in which "understanding" and "interpreting" can no longer be separated in the way suggested by Wittgenstein for the case of rule-following. As far as this dimension of linguistic understanding is concerned, we can find important hints in Wittgenstein; I believe, however, that these hints can be made productive only if they are, as it were, "recontextualized", i.e. related to a context of questions which Wittgenstein was not *primarily* interested in.

2. I shall reformulate the argument of Kripke's, which I mentioned, rather freely, ignoring what I think is a problematic empiricist background of this argument in Kripke's book. I quote two sentences of Kripke's, which I think contain the core of his argument. The first sentence is: "The relation of meaning and intention to future action is normative, not descriptive." The second sentence is: "It turns out that the sceptical solution does not allow us to speak of a single individual, considered by himself and in isolation, as ever meaning anything." I shall ignore the term "sceptical" at this point, since I do not believe that Wittgenstein's dissolution of the – apparent – paradox of rule following is a *sceptical* one. I am rather interested in the kind of justification Kripke suggests for the sentences I quoted. As is well known, Kripke phrases his exposition of the sceptical paradox as well as his solution in terms of the question, how sentences like "X means addition by 'plus'" can have a justified use. And his answer is that the use of such sentences implies the reference to a linguistic community. This thesis, I think, has been misunderstood by many commentators (and somehow by Kripke himself). What the thesis really says is, I believe, that a justifiable and criticizable use of "meaning-sentences" (as I shall call them) presupposes a difference between at least two speakers. Kripke's basic idea (or what I take it to be) will become clearer, if we allow for a certain variation of his examples. Kripke's own formulations conceal the fact that in the use of "meaning-sentences" normally a term used by X is *mentioned*, while a corresponding term is *used* in a peculiar way by the speaker who uses such sentences. For instance: "By (the term) 'and' X means *plus*"; or: "By 'it is pouring' X means *it is raining hard*." The expression on the right side of these sentences are not only *mentioned* by the speaker but used in a peculiar way – otherwise the sentences could not have the empirical content they do have; but since they are used in a peculiar, not in the ordinary way I have underlined them. "Meaning sentences" of this kind evidently function in a similar way as ordinary meaning-sentences like "'nonsense' (in English) means *Unsinn*" (uttered by a German speaker). If we formulate Kripke's "meaning-sentences" in this way,

it becomes clear what can be meant by saying that "the relation of meaning and intention to future action is normative, not descriptive." To say of X, that he/she means *plus* by "and", is to say that X – within certain limits – will use the sign "and" in the *right* way as a sign of *addition*. And saying this I use *my* sign "plus" as a standard of rightness. Should I find out (Kripke's "contrapositive"), that X does *not* use a sign in the "right" way (according to the meaning I imputed to him) – and a special case would be the one, in which X, e.g., has not yet learned to add – I would have to withdraw my ascription of a meaning (or a concept) to X. It now becomes clear why a *primary* use of "meaning sentences" requires at least *two* speakers: For these sentences to have an empirical content and a justified use a difference of perspective between two speakers is required, one of whom uses a term of his/her own language as a standard of correctness with regard to the "meaning something by a word" which he/she ascribes to the other speaker. The "interpreter" must use the terms of his/her own language as a norm of correctness to intelligibly say what another speaker *means* by a word. Even if both speakers use an expression in the same way, a corresponding "meaning-sentence" – "by 'plus' X means *plus*" – still has an empirical content (namely that X uses the term "plus" in the same way I do). In contrast, such sentences would lose their point and the possibility of being justified or criticized in the case of a solitary speaker, who is not an interpreter of other speakers. They could neither have an empirical content nor could that fictional speaker use them or withdraw them with reasons. That means, however, that the "community" which is concerned at *this* point is only the minimal community of two speakers who can ask of each other "What does X mean by 'Q'?" Naturally, this use of meaning-sentences then implies also the possibility of their being used in a first-person manner ("I mean", "I meant" ...), whereby a speaker becomes his/her own interpreter. I shall come back to this point in the last section of my paper.

3. As I indicated already, I do not claim that what I have said amounts to the justification of a strong version of the PL-argument; at best it lends some credibility to the thesis that the grammar of words like "meaning" – in its verbal and its substantive use – or "understanding" presupposes a plurality of speakers, i.e. that these words could have no intelligible place in the practice of a solitary speaker (which, however, would be interesting enough already). *Nota bene*: I believe that my interpretation of what I have called Kripke's basic argument would be a good starting point for reformulating Davidson's idea of "triangulation" of which Davidson himself has never given a plausible account. And it is of course no accident, that the significance which I have attributed to the difference between the *mentioning* and the *use* of expressions in "meaning-sentences" has an exact correlate in Davidson's use of Tarskian T-sentences. However, what I am interested in at this point is something else: I want to try to analyse the role of the second person (that of an interpreter) with regard to the grammar of words like "meaning" and "understanding" somewhat more extensively.

So far I have talked about "meaning something" (in the "active" sense of *etwas meinen*) as the correlate of a certain understanding of a word by the speaker who uses this word (and to whom this "meaning something" may then be ascribed by another speaker): To say that

X means addition by "plus" is to say, that X *uses* the word "plus" in a certain way or that he understands the word "plus" as the sign of addition. So it seems that my reflections still moved within the conceptual plateau of Wittgenstein's considerations concerning the meaning and understanding of words and other linguistic expressions; a conceptual plateau therefore to which Wittgenstein's remarks about the relationship between "meaning", "use" and "rule-following" belong. However, already Kripke's arguments, as I have tried to reconstruct them, concern the problems of "meaning" and understanding in a more specific sense; for what is at stake here is the understanding by a hearer (a "second person") of what a speaker has meant to say by an utterance. "Meaning" and "understanding" are here correlative terms – related to a speaker, on the one hand, and a hearer (an "interpreter"), on the other. What is said by a speaker (what he/she meant to say, his/her "meaning intention" is understood or misunderstood) by a hearer (an "interpreter"). So what is at stake here is the understanding of what a speaker meant to say with his/her utterance in a concrete situation by a hearer. Kripke's "meaning-sentences" therefore actually point already to a Davidsonian problematic. Perhaps one could say: While Wittgenstein analyses the concepts of meaning and understanding primarily from the "performative" perspective of a speaker (first person), Kripke and Davidson thematise these concepts from the "interpretative" perspective of a hearer. How are these two perspectives related to each other?

A first answer to this question might be (and I think this is the answer primarily suggested by Wittgenstein): Understanding a language determines the possible uses which a speaker could make of words and sentences in specific situations and therefore what a speaker could *mean* by using these words and sentences in specific situations; and inasmuch as speaker and hearer understand words and sentences in the same way, it determines the possibilities of *understanding* a speaker's utterances by a hearer. And indeed very often the situation in which two speakers find themselves, together with the meaning of the linguistic expressions they use, practically leave no choice as to the understanding of a speaker's utterance by a hearer: the communicative intentions of a speaker are here in such a way – as Wittgenstein once put it – "embedded" in the situation of speech, that the understanding of an utterance becomes an "automatic" understanding. When the woman at the cashier says "this is five dollars fifty" I understand "this is five dollars fifty" and pay for "this" (what I want to buy) five dollars and fifty cents. It is tempting to speak – in analogy to Wittgenstein's phrase of a "blind" rule-following – of a "blind" understanding of what the woman said. However, I think that the analogy is misleading. I shall therefore rather speak of an "automatic" understanding; and I want to argue now that such an automatic understanding should be seen as the limiting case of an *interpretative* understanding by a hearer (while a "blind" rule-following is not a limiting case of an interpretative comprehension of a rule, but rather always – in actual cases – its very precondition).

4. Why should we speak of an "interpretative" understanding of utterances by a second person (the "interpreter") in the general case? The basic idea is simple. While Wittgenstein's investigations are focussed upon the commonality of a linguistic practice, now the plurality

of perspectives moves into the foreground, which is the very correlate of a common language. While for Wittgenstein the destruction of an intentionalist conception of meaning is the central concern, it is now the unforeseeable plurality of intentions which is at stake and which is opened up by a common language – and therefore also the infinite possibilities of misunderstanding, by which understanding each other becomes a practically relevant problem for adult speakers. And while Wittgenstein thematises understanding above all as a "knowing-how" from the perspective of the first person of a speaker (i.e. as the capacity to follow rules and to participate in a common practice), this "knowing-how" is now thematised from the perspective of the second person of a hearer and that means, at the same time, with regard to the "occasionalistic" aspects of the understanding of utterances-in-situations. "Understanding" now means the right comprehension of the communicative intentions of a speaker by a hearer – communicative intentions which in the more interesting case are not yet clearly determined by a common understanding of words and sentences plus the situation in which they are used.

Let me first explain in which sense I consider cases of "automatic" understanding as limiting cases of an *interpretative* understanding – and therefore as cases of an implicitly interpretative understanding. Most generally speaking the interpretative character of the understanding of utterances by a second person becomes manifest in the ability of a hearer – an "interpreter" – to give an account of what a speaker said in his/her own words and from his/her own perspective, i.e. in his/her ability to *say* what it is he/she has understood or grasped as the communicative intention of the speaker. To speak of an *ability* means, at the same time, that in cases of "automatic" understanding there is, of course, no psychological *act* of interpretation involved. What is important is only, that a hearer could make his understanding of an utterance explicit in his/her own words and from his/her own perspective; and this ability has no correlate in cases of "blind" rule-following. Understanding utterances means grasping what another speaker wants to say; such a grasping, however, means to occupy a place in a space of *possible* interpretations; and often it is a *making sense* of what another says.

Let me next point to some elementary – and rather trivial – aspects of what I have called an "interpretative" understanding. The first aspect is the most inconspicuous and trivial one, it concerns the referential system of personal pronouns and indexical expressions. "I shall not come tonight" somebody tells me, and the next day I tell somebody else "X told me yesterday, he would not come in the evening." To be sure, one might still say that the ability to substitute personal pronouns and indexical expressions for each other is but the expression of our understanding the *meaning* of personal pronouns and indexical expressions. However, think of demonstrative terms or definite descriptions used in a demonstrative way; here a misunderstanding is always possible – and it could be made *explicit*. The next aspect of interpretative understanding is less trivial; it concerns our ability to substitute de-re-ascriptions for de-dictu-ascriptions in interpreting a speaker's reference. "The man over there at the bar who talks with the bar-keeper is Günter Grass", my friend tells me. And I, who knows that the alleged bar-keeper is not a bar-keeper but the owner of the bar, may say to somebody else "X told me that the man over there at the bar who is

talking with the owner is Günter Grass – so replacing my friend's mistaken definite description by a correct one and by this, at the same time *correcting* and *preserving* my friend's reference to "that man over there". And if later on in a theatre I recognize "that man at the bar" sitting in front of me I might say to a girlfriend "X told me that the man over there sitting next to the lady with the pink dress is Günter Grass – correctly reporting of *whom* my friend in the bar told me that he is Günter Grass. However, possibly "that man over there at the bar", whom my friend meant when he said that it is Günter Grass, really talked with the bar-keeper (whom I could not see) and *another* man was talking with the owner: in this case I would have *misunderstood* what my friend was telling me. Robert Brandom, from whom I take this type of examples, claims – I think correctly -, that without the possibility of such a transition from de dictu to de re ascriptions no *intersubjective* content of assertions would be possible. Such transitions, however, amount to substituting one expression (not: of a rule, but of a speaker's reference) by another; and in contrast to the case of substituting deictic expressions or personal pronouns for each other, the substitution of de re- for de dictu expressions is not simply regulated by the meaning of the linguistic expressions used. So we can speak here of "interpretation" in Wittgenstein's sense – with the always open possibility of mis-interpretations.

The third aspect finally, under which we can talk of an "interpretative" understanding in an elementary sense, concerns the "pragmatic" embeddedness of utterances in situations; not only their illocutionary force, but – more generally – the way a speaker wants his/her utterance to be taken by an audience (is the utterance a proposal, a request, a warning or a quotation, is it meant seriously or ironically, literally or part of a performance, a theatrical play etc.?) Obviously even from the point of view of the pragmatic and/or conversational embeddedness of utterances in situations understanding will often be "automatic"; however, an implicit interpretative aspect of such understanding will become manifest in the very moment where misunderstandings become apparent. The famous example of Davidson's is the example of an actor who from the stage screams "Fire!" Even when he means it seriously (the theatre is on fire), the audience may still take it as part of the play. And this might even happen when the actor adds: "This is not part of the play – I mean it seriously."

The difference between the problem of the understanding of utterances by a hearer and the problem of understanding, that is: *knowing* – the meaning of words or sentences of a language (in the sense of Wittgenstein) could also be put in the following way: If, as somebody who is learning a language, I do not (yet) understand (know the meaning of) a word or sentence, I will not be able to *apply* this word or sentence correctly *to* and *in* specific situations (e.g. have not learnt to use words in the right way). If, however, I do not understand the utterance of another speaker, although I have learnt to use the words or sentences which this speaker uses, I do not understand the way in which the utterance is related to the situation – and there is a number of possibilities, why this might happen: I might misunderstand the speaker's reference, I might misunderstand what he is up to, and I might misunderstand the situation *from* which and *in* which somebody is speaking and *therefore* might not grasp the communicative intention of the speaker, etc. Understanding

somebody else's utterances usually presupposes a shared understanding of the "situation" or "context" of speech; understanding a language, however, is only a *necessary* and not a *sufficient* condition of such a "situational" understanding, since often our understandings of situations are in one or the other way in conflict with each other. When Wittgenstein says, that an intention is "embedded" in its situation and only as such can *be* and can be *understood as* the intention it is, he certainly points to an important precondition of having and understanding intentions; what has to be added, however, is not only that specific situations usually allow for many different intentions, but also, more importantly, that situations may be perceived and understood differently from different perspectives. Although it is true that by sharing a language - a form of life - we necessarily also share an understanding of situations in many cases, the sharing of a language also opens up the possibility of a plurality of perspectives *on* situations. So if we talk about "the" situational context of utterances, we have to keep in mind, that situations may always be understood in different and controversial ways. Certainly the understanding of situations can be negotiated with arguments - that much is implied in the idea of *understanding* a situation in a specific way -, however, *the* situational context of an utterance can be what it is only as being understood - or interpreted - in a certain way.

Obviously my distinction between two different dimensions of understanding must be understood as a merely analytic one: *De facto* the two dimensions – the ability to "follow rules" and the ability to communicate with and to understand other speakers – are inseparable from each other. Our ability to speak does not exist prior to and independently of our ability to successfully communicate with and to understand other speakers: in one sense the two abilities are one. In another sense, however, speaking a common language opens up infinite possibilities of misunderstanding and non-understanding, and these possibilities are primarily located at the level of what I have called "interpretative" understanding. From the perspective of a "second person" even the understanding of words and sentences may be seen as – at least potentially – an "interpretative" understanding. For in the moment where we do not understand the words and sentences used by another speaker "automatically", i.e. as words and sentences of our language as we understand it (first person), we are forced to interpret them – Kripke's "meaning-sentences" give us the most primitive idea of such an interpretation, which amounts to a "translation" of words to sentences used by another speaker into "our own" language. Kripke's "meaning-sentences", then, signify a further dimension of "interpretative understanding". That such a dimension of interpretative understanding exists even within a common language, is due to the essential *openness* of the rules of meaning, which in a Wittgensteinian conception of language is but the other side of his conception of rule-following. And if we take this other side of rule-following into account, it becomes clear that a language can never be *quite* a *common* language. The commonality of language is as much a precondition of communication as it is something always again to be achieved through communication. (The latter aspect is what Davidson has made the exclusive and one-sided focus of his theory of interpretation.)

If, however, the understanding of utterances is always – implicitly or explicitly – an *interpretative* understanding, the threat of a sceptical argument seems to reappear, as it were, on the backside of the linguistic practices as they were analysed by Wittgenstein. For at this point a famous rebuttal of scepticism which Wittgenstein has put forward in the form of a question which is meant to disarm the sceptic by means of a pun, seems no longer to be sufficient. In § 504 of the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein says: "But if you say: 'How can I know what he means, when I see nothing but his signs?' then I say: 'How is *he* to know what he means, when he has nothing but his signs either?'" This reply, I said, seems no longer sufficient as a reply to the sceptical question, because Wittgenstein seems to ignore here the infinite possibilities of *misunderstanding* and *non-understanding* as they are characteristic of linguistic communication – even where communication in a common language is concerned. I think that at this point some of Derrida's arguments might be seen as supporting the sceptical question as a *sceptical* one. I am thinking in particular of what Derrida calls the "force" of linguistic signs to "break" with their – real or semiotic – context and their possibility of being "grafted" into new contexts. Something of this sort seems indeed to be involved with what I have called "interpretative understanding". Obviously the clearest example would be the interpretation of texts, which always goes along with a "decontextualization" and "recontextualization" of written signs. Think of my interpretation of Kripke: I certainly did take the few sentences I quoted out of their semiotic context and "grafted" them into the context of my own arguments. I am sure that many people would say that my interpretation did *violence* to Kripke's text, that what Kripke tries to say must be understood in a different way. But what are the criteria of "rightness" here? Kripke's "meaning-sentences" certainly won't do. But then: *what* will do? We all know from our practice of reading philosophical texts that the problem won't disappear when we read texts "word for word" and perhaps try to do, what philologists or historians of philosophy often do, namely to reconstruct the context – the "real" and the philosophical one – of those texts; the problem I am talking about will reappear at every step we take: we will never get at *the* meaning of a text which would not be tainted by our own language, our prejudices, our expectations and by the linguistic context of what will be *our* interpretation of the words and sentences of the text. The intention of the author, so it appears, remains hidden behind a veil of signs. So one might suspect, as Nietzsche occasionally did, that interpretation, at least if we leave the immediate practical concerns and practical certainties of everyday interaction aside, can only be a *making sense* of utterances or texts, for which no criteria of "rightness" can exist. I do not say that this is Derrida's conclusion; what I would say, however, is that Derrida has hardly shown convincingly why this *should* not be his conclusion.

5. Now it is certainly not my intention to defend a sceptical argument of the sort I have just sketched. However, to give a non-sceptical answer to the sceptical question "How can I know what he means?" it is not sufficient to point to Wittgenstein's dissolution of the paradox of rule-following. Although in my own answer I shall come back to Wittgenstein's answers to sceptical questions, these answers will now be answers to a new question.

Let me come back to Kripke for a moment. Kripke has interpreted his reconstruction of Wittgenstein's PL-argument as the sceptical dissolution of a sceptical paradox. However, this dissolution of a sceptical paradox can be called a *sceptical* dissolution only if an empiricist ideal of "factuality" or "objectivity" is presupposed. Since Kripke shares such a presupposition, he himself has provoked unnecessary misinterpretations of his basic argument. What Kripke – or what Kripke's Wittgenstein – really shows is, that the idea of "objective facts" leads us astray where the grammar of words like meaning and understanding is concerned. But if this is true it does not make sense to call Wittgenstein's dissolution of the paradox a "sceptical" one. I think something similar will hold with regard to the present sceptical question: not Hume – as for Kripke -, but Bishop Berkeley may provide here an analogy. Berkeley's "esse est percipi" could be seen as a somewhat queer anticipation of something which might be intelligibly said about the being of linguistic meaning: its "esse", one might say, is "interpretari". Linguistic meaning has its being in a process of interpretation. As far as the meaning of utterances (or of texts) from the perspective of a "second person" (i.e. of an interpreter) is concerned, the question of a meaning "in itself" (beyond interpretation) is senseless; and from the "performative" perspective of the "first person" (of a speaker) the question does not arise, because a speaker, while speaking, need not interpret herself (she just follows the rules or applies them in an innovative way, depending on the situation). The question what a speaker means to say by her utterances poses itself essentially from the perspective of a second person; the grammar of the expression "meaning something" has to be construed basically from the perspective of a second person. To be sure, this is not yet a rebuttal of the sceptical question; however, I shall try to show that it is at least the beginning of such a rebuttal.

6. To show this I next want to discuss how the concept of truth is involved in the interpretation of utterances and texts. The relationship between truth and interpretation has been a central concern of both Gadamer and Davidson. Speaking generally, the thesis of the "truth-relatedness" of interpretation says that in the interpretation of utterances or texts we necessarily must raise – either explicitly or implicitly – a question concerning the truth of *what* is interpreted. We can do this, however, only by bringing our own current beliefs and prejudices into play via an anticipation of what a speaker or author could intelligibly mean to say. It is this specific involvement of an interpreter with what he is interpreting which Gadamer – following Heidegger – has analysed as the peculiar structure of the hermeneutic circle. This circle does not only concern the relationship between the parts and the whole of a text, but also, and more importantly, the constitutive role which the interpreter's beliefs and anticipations, concerning the problems the text is *about*, play in the *process of interpretation*. Furthermore, both Gadamer and Davidson have argued – albeit in different ways – that a "presupposition of truth" is a condition of possibility of making sense of what other speakers say (Gadamer's "fore-conception of perfection" and Davidson's "principle of charity"). It is these "hermeneutic principles" or "principles of interpretation" which are supposed to delimit the arbitrariness of interpretation. (When I shall talk about truth in what follows, I shall use the term in a *wide* sense, applying it to all kinds of assertions beliefs, or presuppositions – not only empirical, but also moral,

evaluative etc. assertions, beliefs and presuppositions -, for or against which reasonable argument is possible.)

For reasons which should become clear later on I want to propose at this point a hermeneutic principle which is weaker than Gadamer's as well as Davidson's "presupposition of truth". I call it the "principle of intelligibility", which might be understood as a pragmatic reformulation of Davidson's principle of charity. My claim is that a presupposition of intelligibility is a necessary presupposition if we want to make sense of utterances or texts at all. The presupposition of intelligibility is the presupposition that what a speaker says is intelligibly related to the situation and context of his/her utterances as the interpreter sees them. In a situation of "radical interpretation" such a presupposition will more or less coincide with Davidson's principle of charity, which then may be split into two components: a principle of coherence and a principle of correspondence (postulating a maximization of truth). But only in such a situation can the principle of correspondence – i.e. the presupposition of truth – play the prominent role which Davidson attributes to it. For in such a situation the main problem is to learn the meaning of the words and sentences of the foreign language; the presupposition of truth is here equivalent to the presupposition that the foreign speakers do speak a language and have learnt to follow the rules of *their* language. Davidson, however, falsely generalizes this situation of radical interpretation and makes it the paradigm of communication in general. (The reason for this false generalization is, I think, Davidson's fixation upon a Tarskian theory of interpretation, from the vantage point of which the differences between "radical" and "ordinary" interpretation indeed may be seen as being merely a matter of degree.) In contrast, the paradigm which I take as my starting point is communication in a more or less common language, where the problem very often is *not* to find out the meaning of words and sentences used by a speaker, but the communicative intention with which he/she uses them. It seems obvious to me, however, that it is precisely the *sharing* of a language by which a multi-dimensional space of truth is opened up, in which the possibilities of *disagreement*, i.e. of possible errors and false beliefs and therefore the possibilities of debate about questionable truth claims grow indefinitely. And with the possibilities of disagreement the possibilities of misunderstanding grow indefinitely as well. Although disagreement and misunderstanding are two different things, they are also related to each other; and this is because of the "truth-relatedness" of interpretation which I mentioned above. Precisely because as interpreters we cannot presuppose that other speakers are always right in what they say or write, understanding what is spoken or written involves a sorting out of what is true and false, adequate and inadequate, plausible and implausible, relevant and irrelevant in what is said or written. But since the beliefs and presuppositions - which an interpreter necessarily must bring into play in his/her interpreting what others say or write - are themselves always a matter of possible disagreement, they can always be a source of possible misunderstanding as well. Therefore a disagreement about interpretations usually involves either a disagreement about the truth or adequacy of what is said or written or a disagreement about certain presuppositions made by speaker and interpreter resp.

What I have argued so far is that a presupposition of intelligibility must be operative in our interpretation of other speakers' utterances, because otherwise we could not locate each other's speech in an intersubjective space of reasons at all, i.e. we could not identify it *as* (intelligible) speech. In cases of doubt the question which has to be answered is: what could he/she *possibly*, that is *intelligibly*, mean to say? Wittgenstein's remark, that an intention is embedded in its situation, can serve – and usually does serve "automatically" – at least as a principle of *exclusion* in the process of interpretation, even if we must say that intentions can be in many ways embedded in their situation. The presupposition of intelligibility is a presupposition of making sense of what others say. In this function it seems *almost* (not quite) tautological. However, I now want to argue that, after all, it must be seen as being connected in some way – although not in the way Davidson assumes – with a presupposition of truth. Such a presupposition of truth is not only (morally) necessary in cases, where otherwise we would treat another person in an *unjust* way, but also – and more importantly, as Gadamer correctly says, for the sake of understanding itself. If we do not make such a presupposition – or, to use a better term: such a *presumption* – with regard, e.g., to difficult texts, we are likely to miss a possible truth content of such texts; and that means that we *misunderstand* them, understand them *falsely*. If to understand what is said or written is to locate it in a multi-dimensional space of truth and reasons, to do this *correctly* means to correctly "sort out" and relate to each other what is true and what is false (illuminating and obscuring, relevant and irrelevant etc.) in what is said or written. And to do this a presumption of truth is necessary, since only with such a presumption we could be said to be open to a full understanding of what is said or written. The presumption of truth is necessary inasmuch as we are concerned at all with the truth of what is said or written as well with the truth of our own beliefs, the adequacy of the way we see things and even of the way we understand ourselves; it is necessary if we are willing to learn from others – regarding our beliefs, our ways of speaking, or our way of seeing things. However, the presumption of truth with regard to our interpretation of what is said or written does not have the same constitutive role for the practice of interpretation as the presupposition of intelligibility does. For the latter presupposition cannot be withdrawn without, at the same time, ceasing to take another person seriously as a person who is accountable for his/her utterances and actions. In contrast, the presupposition of truth can always be withdrawn if we come to the conclusion that a speaker/writer is *mistaken* – and to be mistaken is not a sign of irrationality or of linguistic incompetence.

7. How does all this bear on the sceptical question which I have raised? I have, after all, re-affirmed some of the presuppositions of this sceptical question: viz. that interpretation is only possible from the perspective and the horizon of the interpreter, which means that the language, the beliefs and prejudices of the interpreter will be essentially involved in his interpreting what somebody else has said or written. And this implies that we, while interpreting, do indeed constantly "graft" the words and sentences of other speakers/writers into new chains of linguistic signs – our own -, decontextualizing and recontextualizing them in an often wild way (as might be said about my interpretation of Kripke). What the sceptical question implied was, that there are no possible criteria of

doing this in the "right" or the "wrong" way, so that the very concept of understanding – with the implied distinction between understanding correctly or incorrectly – would lose its point. What sort of antiseptical reply could be contained in my reflection on "hermeneutic" principles of interpretation?

To prepare a reply I first shall discuss a simple example. Let us suppose a friend of mine, with whom I am hiking in the mountains, suddenly says "I would like a steak". The situation seems clear: my friend expresses the – understandable – wish to eat a steak. If we had been in a butcher's shop and my friend had uttered the same sentence, I would have understood his utterance differently: namely as the expression of his intention to buy a raw piece of meat, and if we had been in a restaurant and my friend had addressed the waiter who just came to take our orders, I would have understood his utterance as the ordering of a fried steak. (It is interesting that the expectations and obligations which are implied by the utterance of the same sentence in three different situations are very different indeed.) The justification of my understanding of my friend's utterance in these different situations rests on my understanding of the situation of which I have reason to assume that we both share it. (How could my friend during our hike in the mountains have meant his utterance as the ordering of a steak? Only if he had been hallucinating out of exhaustion.) So far Wittgenstein's dictum would be sufficient, that an intention must be embedded in its situation. However, I *could* have misunderstood my friend in the mountains: perhaps he did not utter an urgent desire, but only imitated an acquaintance, with whom he had spent the evening before in a restaurant; or he has begun to quote a passage from a book which he is occupied with at the moment – perhaps he forgot the next sentence and falls into silence again; or he tried to start a game which we call a "chain poem" (one of us begins with some line, the other one has to find a line with an endrhyme, and then add a new line, etc. etc.). When we focus our attention solely on the moment of the utterance, one has to admit that a number of possible interpretations – and misinterpretations – would be possible at this point, even if we take the tone of voice or an accompanying gesture as additional clues of understanding. Things will appear differently, if we – as Wittgenstein postulates in analogous contexts – take into account what happened *before* and what happens *after* the utterance, i.e. the "temporal surrounding" or the "narrative context" of the utterance. Intentions are embedded in situations not only with respect to the moment of their utterance, but as part of an ongoing story, and situations, at the same time, may also be the occasions for the beginning of a new story. This also means, however, that "intelligibility" can never just signify isolated utterances or actions. It rather always signifies in one or the other way intelligibility over time, the intelligibility of creatures who are involved in stories, who can learn, who can participate in an ongoing social practice of giving and asking for reasons and who, not least, understand themselves as creatures for whom intelligibility and truth have the force of social norms regarding their speech and action over time. In this sense intentions are "embedded" in situations always as points of intersection between a "before" and an "afterwards"; the reasons for a specific understanding of utterances can therefore never be derived from the moment of the utterance as something being cut out of its before and after. Situations are always understood as part of an ongoing interaction or story we are involved in, and each

understanding implies the anticipation of a specific continuation of such stories, which may turn out to be wrong. In the case of my friend his next utterance could dissolve all misunderstanding; e.g. if he said "I am so hungry", or "do you remember" or "why don't you go on?" So here we have a situation where we clearly can have reasons to interpret an utterance in one or the other way – and often we lack any reasons to *doubt* such an interpretation. One might, however, say that a doubt needs a reason as well. And when we have reasons to doubt our interpretation of what somebody has said, sometimes we shall be able to resolve our doubts and sometimes not. So there is no room for a *sceptical* doubt here, since a sceptical doubt would be the doubt whether we could ever understand any utterance of another speaker correctly, and that is whether there is *any* understanding of other speakers.

What I have tried to show is, that there are trivial cases where a lack of understanding usually *shows* itself in the further process of interaction or communication; so that we can say that usually there are reasons for *interpreting* somebody in a certain way, and often there are reasons also for *questioning* an interpretation. Interpretations therefore, to put it differently, are themselves located in a social space of reasons; and wherever we argue for or against interpretations, we do presuppose that there *is* something to be argued about.

Since the sceptic could hardly deny this, it seems that the sceptical argument must cut deeper if it is to have any force. Obviously it must be meant to show that there is something illusory about our arguing for or against the correctness of interpretations as such. So I come back to the question which I raised above: What sort of antisceptical reply could be contained in my reflection on hermeneutic principles?

I shall answer this question in two steps, because I think the sceptical argument draws the force it seems to have from two different sources. The *first* is the idea that a good, a correct interpretation ought to capture the intentions of the speaker/writer, together with the insight that nothing but his/her signs (and perhaps his/her actions) can provide an access to these intentions. The conclusion, then, is that the intention of the speaker/writer necessarily must remain hidden behind a veil of signs and therefore cannot serve as a "measuring rod" of correct understanding. The *second* source of apparent strength of the sceptical argument is the conviction that there can be no other standards for the rightness of interpretations than the (inaccessible) intentions of the speaker/writer. So the distinction between "right" and "wrong" interpretation collapses.

Ad (1): The first argument is certainly wrong as it stands; actually Wittgenstein already has given a sufficient answer. According to this Wittgensteinian answer the mistake of the argument lies in the assumption that there is an internal, a mental something – the "meaning" or "intention" of the speaker/writer – which, existing prior to the language used to express it, would determine the meaning of his/her utterance, while in principle being inaccessible to an outside observer - i.e. to an interpreter. Evidently this is precisely the kind of argument which after Wittgenstein we should not take seriously any more – even

if we are ready to admit that much of our internal life may remain hidden to an outside observer – or even to ourselves.

Ad (2): It is the second argument which my reflections on the "truth-relatedness" of interpretation were meant to counter. To begin with, the apparent force of the second argument – that there can be no *other* criteria of correctness for interpretations except for the "inaccessible" intentions of the speaker/author – is still dependent on the apparent force of the first argument. For it rests on the presupposition that there must be some objective criterion of correctness, accessible to an impartial interpreter and independent of his/her beliefs and prejudices, if the distinction between "correct" and "incorrect" interpretations is to make sense at all. But such a criterion cannot possibly exist, if an interpreter is always involved with his particular perspective, horizon and beliefs in the act or process of interpretation. What the sceptic could argue, then, is that interpretation always involves a decontextualization and recontextualization of linguistic signs, a "grafting" of signs into a new context and therefore an uncontrollable shift of meaning between speaker/writer and interpreter. The possible force of this argument rests, however, on the presupposition that utterances and texts objectively do have a meaning "in themselves" – it is out there somewhere; if not in the intentions of the speaker/writer, then in utterances or texts produced by him – but inaccessible like intentions, precisely because any attempt to grasp it involves an uncontrollable *shift* of meaning.

What my reflections on meaning and (the "conditions of possibility" of) interpretation were meant to show is, that this way of talking misconstrues the grammar of the word "meaning" as much as intentionalist conceptions of meaning do. For the word "meaning" with regard to utterances and texts can have a *justified* use *only* from the perspective of an interpreter who tries to "identify" this meaning from his/her particular perspective and horizon. Consequently interpretation is the only way to identify the meaning of utterances or texts. To speak of a meaning of utterances or texts beyond that which may be "identified" as this meaning by an interpreter through his/her interpretation can only have an intelligible point if what is meant are better, more adequate or perhaps "deeper" interpretations. So that there is nothing beyond interpretations which could serve as an "objective" standard concerning the correctness of interpretations. In this the sceptic is right; but he misunderstands his own point. For he wrongly assumes that if meanings can only be identified through interpretation, and if there can be no *external* standards of correctness, there can be no standards and criteria at all and therefore no way of *justifying* or criticizing interpretations with arguments. That this assumption is wrong, however, becomes obvious once we reflect upon how the grammar of "meaning" is related to the possibility of interpretation. What I have argued before is, that an interpreter in an act or process of interpretation gets involved with his/her own beliefs, prejudices and his/her current perspective on situations, problems or areas of concerns and with his/her own language as a starting point. So far the sceptic would most likely agree. But what is more important is, that the interpreter will get involved as well with questions of truth – in the broadest possible sense – concerning that which is said or written. I have called this the "truth-relatedness" of interpretation. What has to be understood, then, is that these hermeneutic

preconditions of interpretation define, at the same time, the very conditions of the possibility of "identifying" the meaning of utterances and texts, so that any talk of "the" meaning of utterances or texts prior to or independent of a process of interpretation is empty. To talk about the meaning of utterances or texts presupposes the perspective of an interpreter; *therefore* one might say that the "esse" of meaning is "interpretari". But then the standards and criteria which are always already operative in processes of interpretation are the only *conceivable* ones for a "correct" identification of meaning. That interpretations are often controversial, then, is but another expression of the fact that *truth* is often controversial. It does not mean that there is something illusory about our practice of arguing for or against interpretations. Scepticism with regard to interpretation, then, rests on a false "objectivism" regarding meaning.

Instead of speaking about a "truth-relatedness" of interpretation one might also speak of a *normative* character of interpretation, implying a variety of normative dimensions in which interpretations may involve an evaluation of what is said or written. In contrast to the "intentionalist" and "objectivist" conceptions of meaning which I have criticized, a "normative" conception of meaning and interpretation will link the process of interpretation directly with our truth-oriented social practice of giving and asking for reasons. It is this practice which is constitutive of the normative "framework" of interpretation, without which no identification of meanings from the perspective of a second person - i.e. an interpreter - is possible. This also means that the principles of interpretation I have mentioned above demand an attitude of the interpreter which is quite different from the one suggested by intentionalist conceptions of meaning. For they imply a normative distinction between more or less adequate, i.e. more or less self-critical ways of getting involved with questions of truth and adequacy in the process of interpretation: The hermeneutic principles imply a postulate of hermeneutic "openness" as a condition of successful interpretation, and it is only for this reason that the process of interpretation may be understood as part and parcel of a communicative learning process, in which the language, the perspective, the beliefs and prejudices of the interpreter may always *change* in an unforeseeable way in the *course* of interpretation and communication. To have an open mind in the hermeneutic sense of the word means to be prepared to put one's own perspective, beliefs and prejudices at a risk while interpreting what others say or have written. (It is this aspect of interpretation which has no place in Davidson's theory, but has been focussed upon by Gadamer.)

8. Although I have talked about utterances *and* texts so far, one might object that in the case of textual interpretation things are more complicated than I have presented them here. And this objection certainly has a point. Let me distinguish between two different sorts of texts: those which we feel free to criticize, on the one hand, and those that are taken as "authoritative" texts - like the constitution or, for some people at least, the bible. As to the first kind of texts - let me take philosophical texts as a paradigm case - not much needs to be added to my reply to the sceptical argument. So I would argue again (1) that the "identification" of textual meaning - for which, of course, the internal textual context

provides the most important clues - is again *only* possible from the perspective of an interpreter - and the author might be an important one among the interpreters -: there is no textual meaning "in itself", like a strange entity existing objectively somewhere in the universe; and (2) that the interpreter's understanding of the problems involved – an understanding which may be changed through his carefully reading the text – will always guide his understanding of what the text is saying. The interpreter will try to reformulate in his own words – or by "recontextualizing" the words of the author - what the text, or a passage of the text, is saying, thereby separating, at the same time, what he thinks is true and what is false, what is illuminating and what is doubtful or confused etc etc. in the text. A "correct", i.e. a *good* interpretation of a text would be one which had sorted out the true from the false etc etc. in the right way. Such interpretations can go wrong in many different ways; for instance, I may have missed an important point the author has made, because I did not understand the problems he was dealing with (hence the importance of a "presumption of truth" in such cases); or I may have missed the meaning of certain words or sentences, because I am not familiar enough with, say, ancient Greek or current French language. However, I would claim that wherever serious conflicts of interpretations exist with regard to the meaning of philosophical texts, there are always *substantial* philosophical disagreements involved – concerning our understanding of the philosophical issues or problems which are dealt with in the text. And even a disagreement about what the problem really is that is thematised by a text will often be *also* a disagreement about which problems are *worth* to be thematised. What I want to say is, that disagreement about the interpretation of philosophical texts is inseparable from disagreement about philosophical problems and theses. And the reason why the debate about the "correct" interpretation of philosophical texts is virtually interminable is, I believe, simply that the debate about the hard philosophical questions is interminable. But this, I would argue, is no reason for a *sceptical* doubt concerning interpretation.

To be sure, in the end we may have to admit that no clear-cut boundary line exists between what may still be called an adequate *interpretation* of a text, on the one hand, and what should rather be called a "strong" or "violent", but perhaps productive reading of a text which only *uses* a text to put forward some interesting new thesis. The question whether an interpretation belongs to one or the other category is notoriously controversial; although as far as we are primarily interested in the philosophical problems under debate, this question often seems also rather irrelevant. However, this does not mean that we cannot argue such cases: We may, e.g., show that an interpreter has simply ignored important parts or layers of a text which are incompatible with his interpretation, although, of course, such arguments will again not be independent of our understanding of the *problems* of the text. Understanding a text, then, means to sort out what is true *and* what is false about it in the right way. While for the point of view of *philosophical* truth it often may seem irrelevant whether we understood a text correctly or merely used it to put forward an interesting new thesis, from the point of view of hermeneutic truth we can always ask the *additional* question whether a text has been *interpreted* adequately. So that, even if our interpretation of philosophical texts necessarily gets us involved in questions of truth, we might still distinguish between two ways of getting involved in these questions: One way

in which philosophical *truth* is our main concern and we make a productive *use* of texts; and another one, in which the *meaning of a text* is our main concern and we make a productive use of our philosophical insights in a careful *interpretation* of the text. I think that both ways of dealing with texts are legitimate and necessary, because new philosophical insights often emerge precisely from the interaction of these two ways of dealing with texts.

As to the second kind of texts I have mentioned - the "authoritative" ones - things are certainly more complicated, for here the text is considered as a standard of what is to be taken as true or right. What complicates matters here is, that the interpreter in her understanding of what is true or right must, on the one hand, justify this understanding by reference to what the "authoritative" text is saying, while, on the other hand, her understanding of what is true or right will not only - conversely - guide her interpretation of the text, but will also serve to reinforce the authority of the text. So there is quite a specific kind of "hermeneutic circle" here, which is not only typical for biblical exegesis but, more importantly, for legal interpretation as well. Now the only case I want to consider here is the case of constitutional interpretation in democratic societies, since it is the only case *I* know where reference to an authoritative text is, at the same time, a reference to how *we* (want to) understand ourselves (namely as free and equal citizens), while the authority of religious texts has always been tainted by the - questionable - authority of revelation and of a clerical hierarchy resp. If put in this way, however, the interpretation of an "authoritative" text - of the constitution - will not pose an essentially new problem as contrasted to textual interpretation in general. I think this has become clear in the extended debate between Ronald Dworkin and Stanley Fish about constitutional interpretation. A tacit premise of this debate has been that controversies about constitutional interpretation take place among interpreters all of whom affirm the constitutional principles about whose interpretation they disagree. Elsewhere I have spoken of an unavoidable practical-hermeneutic circle of democratic discourse which is due to the fact that constitutional principles never can take care all by themselves of their own interpretation and institutional implementation. Controversies about their correct interpretation are therefore part of their very "being". Seen in this way, however, the case of an interpretation of - genuine - "authoritative" texts seems not so different any more from that of textual interpretation in general. In both cases there is no possible access to an "objective" meaning of the text, while, at the same time, interpretation - because it always takes place in a social space of reasons - is never an arbitrary imputation of meaning to a text either. Or, as Stanley Fish has put it in response to Dworkin's claim that interpretation is "an activity in need of constraints": "...what I have been trying to show is that interpretation is a *structure* of constraints, a structure which, because it is always and already in place, renders unavailable the independent or uninterpreted text and renders unimaginable the independent and freely interpreting reader." That we go on debating about the meaning of the constitution, then, shows that there is something - our self-understanding as democratic citizens - which is worth arguing about. And, of course, situations are always imaginable in which even genuine authoritative texts may lose (some of) their authority: Even constitutions may be changed.

9. At this point it might be objected that so far I have ignored some of the most important cases of radical hermeneutic doubt which are the real motive force behind the sceptic's arguments. Is it not really the case that there are typical situations – above all situations where it is of utmost importance for us to understand correctly what another person has said or written – where we are tortured by an interminable doubt regarding what it *is* that the other person has said or written? A typical situation would be that of an intimate relationship where the question what the other person meant or implied concerns, at the same time, the quality of the relationship itself. These are cases of existential uncertainty, where understanding the other is of utmost importance – my whole life, so it may appear, is at stake -, while the problem is, that the *situation* of speech, which in ordinary cases of communication often provides unmistakable clues for a correct understanding, is uncertain with regard to what it really is, simply because it is precisely my relationship to the other person which is the most important aspect of this situation. So the utterances, gestures and actions of the other person have to serve as clues for my understanding of the situation, which can therefore not serve as an unmistakable clue for understanding the other person's *utterances*, gestures or actions. A circularity evolves here between the understanding of utterances and the understanding of the "situation" of utterances, while none of the two can provide an unmistakable clue for the other. Or think of the interminable quarrels which sometimes evolve between two persons close to each other about what he or she meant to say or implied by something said at some earlier moment. And whatever the other person says or does in the situations I mentioned may become a new source of hermeneutic doubt or hermeneutic suspicion. And could we not say that these situations of radical hermeneutic doubt or radical hermeneutic suspicion show something illusory about our *ordinary* hermeneutic certainties – and perhaps, by implication, also about our ordinary certainties concerning perception and memory?

I think what such experiences show is *not* that the condition of doubt out of uncertainty should be – or even *could* be – generalized; what they show is, rather, something about the human condition in a more general sense: that we can never completely control the contingencies of life or the fate of our relationships with other persons, that our memories and intentions are weak and unstable and our motives often not clear to ourselves and to others. But these facts about the human condition do not justify a sceptical doubt concerning perception, memory, beliefs or interpretations in the philosophical sense of a *radical* scepticism. Even if I may be uncertain about the motives of my girlfriend to invite me for dinner: to have this doubt I must still be certain that she did invite me for dinner, that this was what she only *could* have meant by saying "Let's have dinner tomorrow night at my place." Perhaps she was not serious and just wanted to get rid of me. But even to have *this* doubt presupposes that I do *not* doubt my understanding of what she meant to say: namely to invite me for dinner. And even if I begin to doubt *that* – I don't trust my memory any more – there will be other things I don't doubt. Even radical doubts presuppose certainties – certainties of perception, memory and interpretation. Were this necessary foundation of possible doubt to collapse completely, we would lose our status as

persons in the full sense of the word – i.e. as rational, accountable and autonomous beings who can act and interact with others in a social space of reasons. To lose this status, however, is not to lose an *illusion*, but to lose a *capacity*. So the problem of *radical*, i.e. philosophical scepticism is that it could only be *lived* at the price of losing one's status as a person.

What I want to say is, that we should distinguish a *realistic* form of scepticism which is tantamount to an insight into the human condition as well as to an awareness of the fact, that human beings are always to some degree a foreign territory for themselves and for others, from a radical *philosophical* scepticism according to which we can never *know* anything or can never *understand* each other. Such a radical philosophical scepticism concerning interpretation can only rest on metaphysical presuppositions regarding what *real* understanding would be. If we demolish these metaphysical presuppositions, we shall be able to give a better account of the realistic *sources* of radical scepticism. If we were not able to understand each other in many cases, there would be no *space* for a radical sceptical doubt; consequently this doubt must be mistaken – and as I have tried to show, it actually rests on unsupportable presuppositions.

10. So far I have largely ignored another possible objection to my thesis, that the question concerning the meaning of utterances or texts can only be raised from the perspective of an interpreter – a thesis which I have used to refute the sceptical argument. The objection I have ignored so far is the objection, that frequently a speaker or author *may* be said to know better than his/her interpreters what he/she meant to say. Would we not give Wittgenstein a privileged place among the Wittgenstein commentators if he were still alive? Or Gadamer, who *is* still alive, among the interpreters of Gadamer's texts?

Let me first discuss this question with regard to ordinary utterances in everyday communication. One might say: A speaker must know what she means, even if an interpreter doesn't. And *this* then would be the standard for a *correct* interpretation which we were looking for. The idea, however, rests on an optical illusion. For even the speaker, after she spoke, becomes a potential interpreter of what she has said; and this means, that even the speaker, once she is confronted with the *question* what it is that she meant to say, can answer this question only from the position of a second person – that of an interpreter. "Only the speaker can know what he means" – this can only amount to saying: while I am speaking, my "meaning" is no object of a possible doubt for me. But this "meaning to say" is not a mental event, of which I know and of which nobody else can know. We should rather say that the question, what I mean, can only be posed from the perspective of an interpreter – and even I myself can only answer this question as an interpreter of what I have said.

Of course, often I do know better than my interlocutors what I meant to say or *how* I have meant what I said. But this "knowing better" presupposes the grammar of the words "meaning" and "understanding" as I have tried to reconstruct it and does not run against

it. It is the "knowing better" from the perspective of a potential interpreter of myself, who can argue with other interpreters about the correct understanding of my utterances and again such argument will not be separable from an argument about the truth and adequacy of what I said. What tends to mislead us here is the term "knowing" (about my intention). If the question concerning my "meaning" can only be raised from the perspective of a second person, then even the speaker can only say what she "knows" (her meaning something) by becoming an interpreter of herself. The self-transparency of meaning-something while speaking is a *performative*, not a *cognitive* one. As an interpreter of herself, however, the speaker can at best be in a relatively privileged position. Usually she will have additional reasons for saying why she could or could not have meant what she said in one or the other way. And these "additional reasons" usually refer to something which the speaker *knows* about the situation or herself and the interlocutors don't know (although in principle they *could* know – e.g. by being told by the speaker). So the speaker *might* know better than her interlocutors how her "meaning-intention" was "embedded" in the situation. But in any case this privileged position of the speaker (concerning the interpretation of what she said) can only be a *relative* one – and often it is not even that. In more complex cases - think of psychoanalysis or of philosophical discussions – we often learn from the interpretations and reactions of our interlocutors that we do not really know what we meant to say; so it happens that "meanings" may be clarified only in the process of communication. And in such cases it is usually obvious that the clarification of meaning intentions is inseparable from a debate about what it would be *adequate* to say.

If it comes to the interpretation of texts – let me again take philosophical texts as a paradigm – it is even more obvious that the author can at best be in a *relatively* privileged position as an interpreter of what he has written – simply because he is more familiar with the context of his own wording, with the ideas, arguments and alternatives he has tried out etc. (And sometimes, of course, he may just be better at philosophy than his audience). But inasmuch a textual interpretation is always a sorting out of what is true and false, adequate and inadequate, illuminating or confused etc., the author is *not* in a privileged position, so that here it becomes completely obvious that a debate about interpretations is inseparable from a debate about truth, and in this debate the author can only have *a* – stronger or weaker – voice among *other* voices. But, of course, authors – except, for instance, in discussions after lectures – usually don't interpret their own writings, but rather continue to talk and write about the questions they have raised in their works, learning from objections and replies, decontextualizing and recontextualizing their former words and sentences and thereby often also criticizing themselves. So if they try to say what they meant to say they will usually try to reformulate in new words what they think was "right" and what was "wrong" in what they have said or written. (Think of Wittgenstein's interpretation and critique of his *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* in the *Philosophical Investigations*.) So that if we ask, what an author could have meant by what he has written we are not looking for a mysterious "meaning-intention" *behind* his words, but are trying to find out what interesting, important or illuminating things he could have meant to say; and these interesting, important or illuminating things – and also the misleading or erroneous things he might have said – we can only reformulate from *our* perspective and

in *our* language. And what I have tried to show is that this is not merely the only way we can go about the "meaning-something" of an author, but that to ask for more is to misunderstand the grammar of "meaning".