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Worldly Semantics and the Myth of the Given

1.1 Introduction

In this opening chapter, I lay out the what I take the explanatory aim of a semantic theory to be and introduce "worldly semantics" as a strategy for accomplishing this aim. I'll then state the thesis, which I'll defend in the next two chapters, that worldly semantics is committed to an instance of what Wilfrid Sellars calls "the Myth of the Given," spelling out at some length what I take this term to pick out. Finally, I'll clarify the target by drawing a distinction between "explanatory" and "elucidatory" models in semantics and illustrating what is at stake in locating, e.g., possible worlds semantics on one side of that distinction rather than the other.

1.2 Our Semantic Aim

Language speakers aren't mindless automota. Generally, they know what they're saying when they use expressions of a language that they know how to speak. They have this knowledge because they know what these expressions mean. The aim of semantics is to understand what it is in which this aspect of the capacity to speak a language, knowledge of meaning, consists. Here is one particularly clear statement of this aim from Seth Yalcin (2018):

> I take it that in natural language semantics, the aspect of reality we are seeking some understanding of is a dimension of human linguistic

> competence—informally, knowledge of meaning. Competent speakers of a language know ('cognize', etc.) the meaning features of expressions of their language. The semanticist is interested in modeling this state of mind and the associated semantic features, (2018, 353).

I take it that most semanticists working in the Chomskian tradition of generative grammar think of the discipline roughly along these lines.[1] In semantics, we are aiming to understand the knowledge of meaning that competent speakers have. We take it that this knowledge explains certain aspects of their linguistic behavior—the behavior that they exhibit in virtue of knowing what expressions of their language mean—and what we're aiming to do, in constructing a semantic theory, is to explain this behavior by modeling the knowledge of meaning that accounts for it. The main task of the semantic theorist is to assign *semantic values* to the expressions of the language for which she is constructing a semantic theory. These semantic values are the entities in the semantic theory that are meant to be mathematically defined models of the meanings of the expressions of which speakers of that language have knowledge. So, meanings are theorized to play a certain sort of explanatory role: knowledge of them is taken to explain certain aspects of speakers' behavior. And semantic values are entities in the theorist's model that are mathematically defined in such a way that they satisfy certain properties, properties which are either identical or structurally analogous to the properties that the theorist takes it that meanings must have in order for them to play the explanatory role that they are theorized to play.

Now, there are several properties that the meanings of sentences are taken to have that are meant to be modeled by the assignment of semantic values to them. To limit the scope of my discussion, I will focus here on just one crucial such property. The meanings of sentences are taken to determine facts consisting

[1] For instance Gennaro Cheirchia and Sally McConnell-Ginnet write "It is the application of mathematical models to the study of the cognitive phenomenon of linguistic knowledge that most generative linguists recognize as their aim," (2).

in these sentences standing in relations of entailment and (in)compatibility (or, consequence and (in)consistency) to one another. One important role of semantic values is to model meanings in such a way that we can explain these facts, thereby explaining speakers' knowledge of them, and thereby explain their behavior. Here is Yalcin again, in a different paper of his, stating this point:

> [S]emantic values are assumed to be the sorts of things consequence and consistency relations are articulated in terms of: when $\Gamma \vdash \varphi$ holds, this is (at least partly) because of the semantic values of (the sentences in) Γ and of φ, respectively. Hypotheses about semantic values can thereby serve to predict, and ground, entailment and consistency facts, hence knowledge of such facts, (2014, 24).

Assigning semantic values to sentences, and then articulating consequence and consistency relations in terms of semantic values, we model the meanings of sentences in such a way that we are able to explain, with the use of our model, how facts consisting in sentences entailing or being incompatible with one another obtain in virtue of these sentences meaning what they do. Then, by modeling of speakers' knowledge of the meanings of these sentences as knowledge of the semantic values we assign to them, our theory will explain how their knowledge of entailment and incompatibility relations obtaining between sentences, knowledge which explains certain aspects of their behavior, is determined by their knowledge of the meanings of these sentences.

1.3 A Toy Language

To see more determinately what aspects of speakers' behavior we're trying to explain in assigning semantic values to sentences in terms of which entailment and incompatibility relations can be articulated, it will be helpful to introduce a very simple "toy language" and then consider what theoretical work a semantic theory for this toy language should be able to do insofar as it aspires to this

explanatory aim. So, imagine a small linguistic community whose members speak a language consisting of the following expressions:

1. Three names: "*a*," "*b*," and "*c*"
2. Three 1-place predicates: "is white," "is gray," and "is black"
3. Three 2-place predicates: "is lighter than," "is darker than," and "is the same shade as"
4. One unary sentential operator: "It is not the case that"
5. Two binary sentential operators: "and" and "or"
6. Left and right parentheses (to avoid ambiguity): "(" and ")"

This is their basic vocabulary: the set of simple expressions that they are able to employ. The grammar of their language, through which complex expressions can be constructed from these simple ones, can be recursively specified as follows:[2]

1. Any name followed by a 1-place predicate is a sentence.
2. Any name followed by a 2-place predicate and then another name is a sentence.
3. If ϕ is a sentence and U is a unary operator ($U\phi$) is a sentence.
4. If ϕ and ψ are sentences and B is a binary operator ($\phi B\psi$) is a sentence.
5. If some string of lexical items can't be constructed by the use of these rules, it's not a sentence.

Call any sentence that contains no sentential operators an "atomic sentence." There are thirty-six atomic sentences of our toy language, including, for instance "*a* is white," "*b* is darker than *c*," "*c* is gray," and so on. There are infinite non-atomic sentences, formed by conjoining atomic sentences with operators and parentheses. Our toy language consists in this infinite set of sentences. This is, of course, a woefully impoverished language, and it can hardly be called a language at all, but it is enough of a language for our purposes here.

[2] I am using "grammar" here not in the Chomskyian sense.

I will make extensive use of this toy language throughout this dissertation, so it is worth saying a few words now to preliminarily justify my doing so. As it is probably clear, I have laid out the simplest toy language that I possibly could. I hope it will be clear in what follows that I could have introduced a much fancier toy language here—with more vocabulary belonging to these grammatical types, vocabulary belonging to additional grammatical types, and a more complex grammar to accommodate this additional vocabulary—and used it to the same end in the next few chapters. I take it that doing this would have only unnecessarily complicated things, so that is why I have not done so, saving the introduction of more sophisticated toy languages to the positive part of the dissertation where I develop the alternative framework of discursive role semantics.[3] Of course, it takes some cognitive dissonance to imagine that we could really have what Brandom calls an "autonomous discursive practice" whose members speak this "language" and it alone. Indeed, as we'll later see, there could not be such a practice, and we will need a richer language in order to be able to think of there as being speakers who employ that language and it alone. For now, however, let us engage in the imaginative exercise of taking there to be speakers who speak this language and it alone, grasping the meanings of the expressions that belong to it and behaving certain ways in virtue of grasping these meanings.

Suppose our speakers act in such a way that shows that they take the sentences "*a* is darker than *b*" and "*b* is lighter than *a*" to be synonymous. Now, if they have semantic vocabulary, they might say "These two sentences are synonymous," "These two sentences mean the same thing," or "One says the same thing in uttering either of these two sentences," but we need not even credit them with this sort of vocabulary in order to get our basic explanandum into view; it is sufficient

[3]It is also worth pointing out that, grammatically, I have taken some shortcuts and treated this toy language much more closely resembles the formal language of first-order logic than a natural language like English. Once again, this is just for simplicity, and nothing important hangs on this. Contemporary work in semantics, following Montague, "reject[s] the contention that an important theoretical difference exists between formal and natural languages," (192).

that they, in their linguistic practices, treat the two sentences in the way that two synonymous sentences ought to be treated. For instance, whenever a competent speaker utters one, they'll be prepared to utter the other, if an incompetent speaker utters one but refuses to utter the other, they'll be corrected by competent speakers, and so on. Similarly, competent speakers of this language take the sentences "*a* is black" and "*b* is white" to jointly entail the sentence "*a* is darker than *b*." Any competent speaker that utters both "*a* is black" and "*b* is white" will also be prepared to utter "*a* is darker than *b*," and if an incompetent speaker utters the first two but refuses to utter the third, they'll be corrected, and so on. Finally, they take the sentences "*a* is white" and "*a* is black" to be incompatible. They'll never utter both sentences at the same time, they'll correct incompetent speakers that do, and so on. These activities, we theorize, are manifestations of their knowledge of the meanings of the sentences "*a* is darker than *b*, "*b* is lighter than *a*," "*a* is white," "*a* is black." That is to say, it is in virtue of knowing what these sentences mean that the speakers of our toy language behave in these ways. What we want to do, in constructing a semantic theory for their language, is understand this knowledge of meaning in such a way that enables us to explain this behavior. Officially, what we want to do is assign semantic values to these sentences, formal models of their meanings, such that if speakers know that these sentences have these semantic values, they'll know these sentences stand in these semantic relations, since, if they know that these sentences stand in these semantic relations, they'll behave in these ways.

Given this explanatory aim, assigning semantic values to sentences should enable us to account for facts like the following:

F1. The sentence "*a* is darker than *b*" is synonymous with the sentence "*b* is lighter than *a*."

F2. The sentences "*a* is black" and "*b* is gray" jointly entail the sentence "*a* is darker than *b*."

F3. The sentence "*a* is black" is incompatible with the sentence "*a* is gray."

If, by assigning semantic values to the sentences "*a* is darker than *b*," "*b* is lighter than *a*," "*a* is black," and "*b* is white," we are able to account for these facts, then, by thinking of speakers' knowledge of the meaning of these sentences in terms of their knowledge of these semantic values, we can explain their knowledge of these facts, and, accordingly, the behavior they exhibit in virtue of having this knowledge.

1.4 The Meanings of Content Words

In specifying (F1)-(F3), I have picked out by way of example only one class of synonymy, entailment, and incompatibility relations that obtain between sentences of this toy language: the class of *material* rather than *formal* relations of synonymy, entailment, and incompatibility. For instance, the sentences "*a* is gray" and "*a* is black" are *materially* incompatible, whereas the sentences "*a* is gray" and "It's not the case that *a* is gray" are *formally* incompatible. Articulating this distinction with the use of a more contemporary vocabulary, material semantic relations are relations that obtain between sentences in virtue of the meanings of (what are often called) the "content words" contained in those sentences, words like "gray," "black," or "darker than," whereas formal semantic relations are relations that obtain between sentences in virtue of the meanings of (what are often called) the "function words" like "not," "and," and "or."[4] Now, articulating exactly what this distinction consists in will depend on the sort of semantic theory that one ends up endorsing. In almost every semantic theory, however, the semantic val-

[4]See, for instance, Lobner (2002, 4-5) and Szabo (2019) for an articulation of this distinction with the use of this terminology. This terminology is somewhat confusing, since the meanings of content words are themselves taken to be functions. Kerns (2011) uses the terms "categorematic" and "syncategorematic"

ues assigned to content words will form the foundation on the basis of which the rest of theory will be constructed.

It is only given the assignment of semantic values to these simple content words that the assignment of semantic values to function words, generally conceived in terms of operations on the semantic values of content words, makes any sense at all. For instance, in a possible worlds semantics, semantic values for logically complex sentences can be understood in terms of the set-theoretic operations of complementation, intersection, and union only insofar as atomic sentences are assigned sets of possible worlds as semantic values, and atomic sentences can be assigned sets of possible words as semantic values only insofar as the content words that make them up, words like "gray" or "black," are assigned suitable semantic values, for instance, functions map each possible world to the set of things that are gray in that world or black in that world. So the assignment of suitable semantic values to content words is required at the base level of semantic theories. This fact about the structure of semantic theories follows directly from such a theory's commitment to the compositionality of meaning: that the meaning of a complex sentence is determined by the meaning of its parts and the way those parts are put together. If we cannot think of the meanings of content words as adequately modeled by the semantic values that a compositional semantic theory assigns to them, the whole theory that is based on these basic assignments falls like a house of cards.

Despite the fact that semantic theories require the assignment of semantic values to content words at their base level, most semanticists do not concern themselves with these basic assignments of semantic values. While it does fall to the semantic theorist to specify the semantic types corresponding to content words of different syntactic categories, the task of specifying the meanings of these basic expressions in any substantive way is not a task for semantics, properly construed. Distinctions in meaning between such words as "gray" and "black," insofar as

they belong to the same syntactic category, are, "from the point of view of semantic theory, simply brute," (Yalcin 2018,). So, for instance, a possible worlds semantics might assign to the 1-place predicate "gray" the function that maps each world to the set of things that are gray in that worlds, and it will assign "black" the function that maps each world to the set of things that are black in that world. Of course, such a theory won't tell us what it is for something to be gray as opposed to white, but we shouldn't expect it to. A dictionary can tell us this. To think that it's the job of the semantic theory to tell us what a dictionary would tell us would be to confuse semantics with lexicography, and that, as Richard Thomason (1975) says, is "a persistent and harmful source of misunderstanding in matters of semantic methodology," (48). Yalcin quotes this sentiment, expressed by Thomason in his introduction to Montague's *Formal Philosophy*, in support of this attitude towards the meanings of content words:

> [W]e should not expect a semantic theory to furnish an account of how any two expressions belonging to the same syntactic category differ in meaning . . . 'Walk' and 'run', for instance, and 'unicorn' and 'zebra' certainly do differ in meaning, and we require a dictionary of English to tell us how. But the making of a dictionary demands considerable knowledge of the world [of a sort the semantic theorist should not be expected to furnish]," (Yalcin 2018, quoting Thomason (1975); Thomason's italics, Yalcin's bracketed addition.)

Knowing the meanings of content words like "walk" and "run" or "black" and "gray." requires "considerable knowledge of the world." A semantic theorist, in taking speakers to have knowledge of the meanings of words like "walk" and "run" or "black" and "gray," appeals to this worldly knowledge that speakers have—their knowledge of what it is for something to walk as opposed to run, or what it is for something to be black as opposed to gray—but this worldly knowledge, which is an ingredient in speakers' knowledge of meaning, is to be distinguished from the properly semantic knowledge that is the proper concern of

the semantic theorist. As such, it is sufficient for the semanticist to say something along the following lines:

> The meaning of the predicate "gray" is determined entirely (or, at least, sufficiently for our purposes) by the fact that it is correctly applied to some object just in case that object is gray. Accordingly, we can model the meaning of the predicate "gray" as a function that maps each possible world, each way for things to be, to the set of things that are gray in that world; the set of things to which that predicate is correctly applied. What we model in modeling the meaning of this predicate in this way what a speaker knows in knowing the meaning of this predicate; they know that, however things are, this expression is to be applied to something just in case that thing is gray.

Having given this justification of their formal model of meanings of 1-place predicates such that they compose in the right ways with the meanings of other types of expressions, the semanticist can leave it to the lexicographer to say, substantively, what it is for something to be gray, how being gray differs from being black, and so on.

This apparent division of labor may seem to be of a piece with the divide-and-conquer methodology found throughout the natural sciences. However, implicit in this way of thinking about speakers' knowledge of meaning is the idea that speakers' knowledge of certain worldly facts—for instance, the fact that the property of being gray is incompatible with the property of being black (i.e. being gray is a way for something to be such that, if something is that way, it cannot be black)—is explanatorily prior to their knowledge of certain semantic ones—for instance he fact that the predicate "gray" is incompatible with the predicate "black." It is because the former sort of knowledge, the worldly knowledge, is not taken to be the proper object of a semantic theory that the knowledge of the incompatibility of the predicates, from the point of view of the semantic theory, can be taken to come for free as a conseuqence of semantic values that are "from the point of view of semantic theory, simply brute." For instance, in a possible

worlds semantics, one simply assigns the predicates intensions that are assumed to be disjoint, appealing to one's own knowledge of what it is for something to be gray or black in the assessment of these intensions as disjoint. This appeal to one's own knowledge of what it it is for something to be gray or black can be taken to be unproblematic only insofar as this knowledge that one appeals to is taken to be "knowledge of the world of a sort the semantic theorist should not be expected to furnish." This worldly knowledge is taken to underlie the semantic knowledge that constitutes of the base of the semantic theory, the knowledge of the meanings of content words like "gray" and "black" that grounds knowledge of facts such as (F1)-(F3). The semantic theories I will concern myself with in the negative part of this dissertation all assign semantic values to content words in accord with this theoretical orientation. They are all versions of what I will call "worldly semantics." Let me now lay out, in abstract terms, the basic structure of a worldly semantic theory.

1.5 The Basic Structure of Worldly Semantics

Most work in contemporary semantics is guided by the following core idea, which I'll quote directly from the introductory textbook in formal semantics by Dowty, Wall, and Peters (1981):

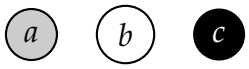
> To know the meaning of a (declarative) sentence is to know what the world would have to be like for the sentence to be true, (4).[5]

To see how this core idea applies to the speakers of our toy language, let's suppose that there are only three things in the world in which they live—*a*, *b*, and *c*—and that these are the things that are named by the names "a," "b," and "c."

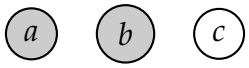
[5]See also the widely used introductory textbook by Heim and Kratzer, where they open with the sentence,"To know the meaning of is to know its truth conditions," going on to tell us, to know the meaning of a sentence, you don't have to know whether it is true; "What you do know, however, is what the world would have to be like for it to be true," (1).

Furthermore, let's suppose that there are only three ways that these three things can be—completely white, completely gray, or completely black—and that these are the ways the speakers of our toy language say that something is when they say of it that it "is white," "is gray," or "is black." Finally, let's suppose that there is only one shade of gray, so if something is darker or lighter than something else, it can't be the case that they're both the same color.

Now, consider the sentence "*a* is gray." There are many ways that the world of the speakers of our toy language can be such that this sentence is true. The world can be such that *a* is gray, *b* is white, and *c* is black. That is, the world can be like this:



Alternately, the world can be such that *a* is gray, *b* is gray, and *c* is white. That is, the world can be like this:



As far as the truth of "*a* is gray" is concerned, whether *b* is white or *b* is gray or whether *c* is black or *c* is white does not matter. What does matter is whether or not *a* is gray. The sentence "*a* is gray" is true just in case the world is such that *a* is gray. To know the meaning of this sentence, on a truth-conditional theory of the sort described by Dowty, Wall, and Peters, is to know just this.

Now, there are different ways in which this basic idea, expressed by Dowty, Wall, and Peters, can be implemented in a semantic theory in order to arrive at formally specificiable semantic values that are meant to serve as models of what speakers know in knowing the meaning of a sentence. I will consider what I take to be the two basic ways in which this idea can be implemented in the next two chapters. For now, however, let's consider the general structure

of a theory that conforms to this basic idea. Such a theory will be a version of what I will call "worldly" semantics. On a worldly semantic theory, we take speakers' knowledge of meaning to asymmetrically depend on their knowledge of "worldly" entities and their relations. The general sorts of "worldly" entities to which a worldly semantics appeals might be picked out with expressions such as "things in the world," "ways that things in the world can be," "ways that things in the world can relate to one another," "things that can obtain in the world," "ways the world as a whole can be," and so on. Proponents of worldly semantics take these expressions to pick out certain sorts of worldly entities, often spoken of as "objects," "properties," "relations," "states of affairs," "possible worlds," and so on. Which which of these sorts of entities are given priority over the others will vary from theory to theory, but, in a worldly semantics, speakers are taken to have knowledge of entities of these sorts and knowledge of relations that entities of these sorts stand to one another, and their knowledge of the meanings of sentences of their language is taken to depend on this worldly knowledge. o see how a worldly semantics is supposed to work, consider the sort of explanation of (F3) specified above—the fact that the sentence "*a* is gray" is incompatible with the sentence "*a* is black"—that we would provide if we endorse a worldly semantics.

We start by taking the speakers of our toy language to have a bit of worldly knowledge: They know that if *a* is gray, then it can't be the case that *a* is black. This bit of worldly knowledge might be analyzed in different ways. We might analyze it in terms of ways the world as a whole can be, saying that speakers know that, however the world can possibly be, the set of things that are gray in the world and the set of things that are black in the world are disjoint—they don't have any elements in common. Spelling this out a bit, we might take our speakers to have a grip on a space of different possible ways for the world as a whole to be, a space of different "possible worlds," and know that, for each point in this space, each

possible world, the set of things that are grey and the set of things that are black are disjoint—these two sets do not have any common elements. So, whichever element of the total set of possible worlds is actual, if *a* is an element of the set of gray things, then it isn't an element of the set of black things. This is one way to analyze what it is that our speakers know in knowing that, if *a* is gray, then it can't be the case that *a* is black. Since the worldly entities of which speakers are taken to have knowledge are worlds as a whole, I'll call it an "extra-worldly" analysis. Alternately, we might analyze our speakers' knowledge of the fact that if *a* is gray, then it can't the case that *a* is black entirely in terms of ways things in this world can be. We might say that our speakers know that no single thing can, at the same time, be both gray and black. Spelling this out a bit, we might say that there is a basic modal fact about the property of being gray and the property of being black, one that obtains in virtue of the essences of these two properties; it is not possible for a single thing to, at one time, instantiate both the property being grey and the property of being black. So, since *a* is a single thing, if *a* instantiates the property of being gray, it is not possible for it, at the same time, to instantiate the property of being black. This is a different way to analyze what it is that our speakers know in knowing that, if *a* is gray, then it can't be the case that *a* is black. Since the basic worldly entities of which speakers are taken to have knowledge here are things *in* the world, objects and properties that these objects might have, I'll call it an "intra-worldly" analysis. However we want to analyze our speakers' worldly knowledge of the fact that if *a* is gray, it can't be the case that *a* is black, if we endorse a worldly semantics, we'll think of our speakers' knowledge of the fact that the sentence "*a* is gray" is incompatible with "*a* is black" as asymmetrically depending on a bit of worldly knowledge of this sort.

Consider first the semantic picture suggested by an extra-worldly conception of this bit of worldly knowledge. On a standard variant of extra-worldly semantics, the semantic value of an expression is a function that maps possible worlds to

extensions. For names, these extensions are taken to be particular objects, and for 1-place predicates, these extensions are taken to be sets of objects. So, the semantic value of "*a*" is a function that maps each possible world to *a*, a particular thing that we may assume exists in each world, and the semantic value of "is gray" is a function that maps each possible world to the set of things that are gray in that world.[6] Now, we have a rule of composition that says that, for any sentence of the form "*n* is *F*," consisting in a name "*n*" concatenated with a 1-place predicate "is *F*," the semantic value of that sentence is the set of worlds *w* such that the object to which the semantic value of "*n*" maps *w*, namely *n*, is an element of the set of objects to which the semantic value of "*F*" maps *w*, the set of things that are *F* in *w*. So, the semantic value of "*a* is grey" is the set of worlds in which *a* is an element of the set of grey things in that world. Likewise, the semantic value of "*a* is black' is the set of worlds in which *a* is an element of the set of black things in that world. Now, if one knows that, for each possible world, there is no object that is an element of both the set of gray things in that world and the set of black things in that world, and one knows that "*a* is grey" and "*a* is black" have the semantic values that they do, one will know that the sets of worlds that are the semantic values of "*a* is grey" and "*a* is black" are disjoint. That, according to an extra-worldly semantics, is just what it is to know that the sentences "*a* is grey" and "*a* is black" are incompatible. In this way, an extra-worldly semantics takes speakers' semantic knowledge to asymmetrically depend on the bit of worldly knowledge.

Now consider the semantic picture suggested by an *intra*-worldly conception of this bit of worldly knowledge. On a standard variant of an intra-worldly semantics, the semantic value of a name is the object named by that name, and the semantic value of a 1-place predicate is the property expressed by that predicate.

[6] At some point, we'd have reason to drop the assumption that *a* exists in each world. In which case, we can take the semantic value of a name to be a partial function that maps each possible worlds in which the object actually named by that name exists to the.

So, the semantic value of "*a*" is *a*, the object that is named by "*a*," and the semantic value of "grey" is the property of being grey, the property that is expressed by "grey."[7] Now, we have a rule of composition that says that, for any sentence of the form "*n* is *F*," consisting in a name "*n*" concatenated with a 1-place predicate "is *F*," the semantic value of that sentence is a structured proposition that represents the object that is the semantic value of "*n*" as instantiating the property that is the semantic value of "*F*." So the semantic value of "*a* is grey" is a structured proposition that represents *a* as instantiating the property of being grey. Likewise, the semantic value of "*a* is black" is a structured proposition that represents *a* as instantiating the property of being black. Now, if one knows that the property of being grey and the property are being black are incompatible in the sense that it is not possible for a single object to instantiate both of these properties, one will know that these two propositions that are the semantic values of "*a* is grey" and "*a* is black" cannot both be true; taken together, they represent a single thing as being two ways that a single thing cannot, at a single time, be. That, according to an intra-worldly semantics of this sort, is just what it is to know that the sentences "*a* is grey" and "*a* is black" are incompatible. In this way, an intra-worldly semantics takes speakers' semantic knowledge to assymetrically depend on the bit of worldly knowledge.

Though this theoretical structure is rarely as explicit as I have made it out here, I take it that worldly semantics is pretty much ubiquitous in contemporary theorizing about speakers' knowledge of meaning in both philosophy and linguistics. Almost every working semanticist practices a variant of worldly semantics. Semantic theories that are often taken to be on opposite sides of fundamental dividing lines in semantic theorizing—for instance, truth-conditional semantics vs. dynamic semantics, possible worlds semantics vs. situation semantics—will generally still all be variants of worldly semantics. Nevertheless, I will argue

[7] This will need some refinement. Soames, for instance,

here that such semantic theories are not able to do the explanatory work that a semantic theory is supposed to be able to do. They are not able to give us anything resembling an account of the apsect of semantic competence consisting in knowledge of meaning. The basic problem is this: we cannot give an account of speakers' knowledge of meaning as asymmetrically depending on their knowledge of worldly entities and their relations in the way that a worldly semantics requires us to do because this worldly knowledge itself depends on speakers' knowledge of meaning. To give a name to the general form of the problem of which this problem is a specific instance and to give some philosophical context for the line of critique I am about to prosecute, my claim is that, in proposing to explain speakers' knowledge of meaning in the way that they do, proponents of worldly semantics are guilty of a version of what Wilfrid Sellars calls "The Myth of the Given," (1956).

Now, my main aim in this dissertation is not the exegesis of Sellars.[8] I do take it, however, that all of my claims, both negative and positive, are basically Sellarsian ones. Accordingly, it is worth doing a little work to articulate, in Sellars's own terms, what the general form of the problem is and how, by his own lights, worldly semantics is an incarnation of it.

1.6 The Myth of the Given

"The Myth of the Given" has become something of a buzzword among contemporary philosophers who have taken themselves to have learned some lesson from Sellars, and it has become a cause of frustration for some contemporary philosophers who aren't part of the club that throws this term around but get it thrown at them. David Chalmers, who gets this term thrown at him as much as anyone in contemporary philosophy, takes the term to pick out the view that "experiences

[8] I have a companion paper, of which a version of the next section is a

have a special epistemic status that renders them 'given' to a subject," going on to say, "Sellars's (deliberately abusive) term for the view has caught on, and today it is not uncommon for this label to be used in criticizing such views as if no further argument is necessary," (299). I am quite sympathetic to Chalmers's frustration here. It is quite common for the label "the Myth of the Given" to be applied to some view in order to dismis it without any further argument. Indeed, in many cases of its application, it seems to function as a *mere* label, without any clear descriptive content. The first thing I want to point out is that the set of views that are aptly characterized as instances of "the Myth of the Given" extends much wider than specifically views about sensory experience. Sellars does start his critique of the Myth of the Given by considering views in which sensory expereinces have a special epistic status, but he takes this to be only "a first step in a general critique of the entire framework of givenness," (1956/1997, 14). When I use the term, I mean to speak about this general framework. I will now try to spell out, to the best of my ability, what I take that to be.

Sellars introduces the phrase "The Myth of the Given" in his master work *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* (*EPM*). However, in *EPM*, he does not explicitly state, in general terms, what he takes "The Myth of the Given" to be. Rather, he goes through several particular incarnations of it, starting with classical sense-datum theory and progressing to various other views in philosophy of mind, epistemology, and philosophy of language, that are more subtle instances of the mythical framework. The criticisms of these particular incarnations are developed in detail in much of Sellars's other work, but it is only in *EPM* that he presents these criticisms as different aspects of a unified attack on a single framework. It is thus somewhat surprising that, though Sellars is clear in *EPM* that he takes the "framework of givenness" to be pervasive in practically every area of philosophy, nowhere in *EPM* does he say what this framework actually is.

One of the only places in Sellars's corpus where he comes close to stating,

general terms, what he takes The Myth of the Given to be is quite late in his career, in the first of the three Carus Lectures.[9] There, he provides a characterization of what he regards as "perhaps, the most basic form" of the Myth of the Given, the principle that "If a person is directly aware of an item which has categorial status C, then the person is aware of it *as* having categorial status C," (1981, 11). To say that this is "the most basic form" of the Myth is not, of course, to say that it is what the Myth is. However, Sellars does at least seem to suggest that this does generally characterize the Myth of the Given, when he goes on to say, negatively,

> To reject the Myth of the Given is to reject the idea that the categorial structure of the world, if it has a categorial structure, imposes itself on the mind as a seal imposes an image on melted wax. (1981, 12)

So, put positively, the Myth of the Given would be the idea that the categorical structure of the world imposes itself on the mind as a seal imposes an image on melted wax. Is that what the Myth of the Given is? I do not think so—at least, not exactly. To take this to be what the Myth of the Given is hinges on a *constitutive* way of reading the "To ϕ is to ψ" formulation, and this is not the only way to read such an expression; there is also a *consequential* reading. For instance, one might way, "To walk is to move one's body." This is a felicitous thing to say, at least in some contexts, but, clearly, walking and moving one's body are not the same thing. Walking is a specific way of moving one's body. So, the "To ϕ is to ψ" here means, roughly, that ψ-ing is a *consequence* of ϕ-ing. That, I take it, is the right way to hear the above quoted passage. Rejecting the idea that the categorical structure of the world imposes itself on the mind is a *consequence* of rejecting the Myth of the Given, and this is what rejecting its "most basic form" amounts to, but rejecting this idea is not just what it is to reject the Myth of the Given. Nevertheless, I take it that Sellars begins to come quite close here to a general formulation of the Myth of the Given; we just need to widen its scope.

[9] One other place where he comes close to providing a general statement is in "I

Sufficiently widening the scope of the above formulation, however, is not an easy task. Given the pervasiveness of the myth across disparate fields of philosophy and different philosophical approaches, attempting to sum it up in a way that captures all of its instances without being completely devoid of content seems nearly impossible. Indeed, this has led some authors, such as Conant (M.S.), to deny that any formulation of the Myth of the Given that is both substantive and completely general is possible. While I am sympathetic to Conant's criticisms of substantive fomulations that do fail to be sufficiently general, such as Burge's (2003) and Brandom's (1997), I nevertheless think it is possible to provide a general formulation of the Myth. Widening the scope of the above quotation, and dropping the metaphor of the seal on wax, which may not be apt as a characterization of every form of the Myth, here is what I take the Myth of the Given to be:

> The Myth of the Given is the idea that the structure of the reality, be it matter-of-factual, metaphysical, or categorial, is imposed upon the mind from without.

This formulation of the Myth of the Given is quite a bit different than what you'll get from most commentors, and it may well seem to be so general as to be empty, so a little work is going to be required to justify it.

First, I individuate three levels of structure in this formulation, and I should be clear about what I mean by each of these three levels. I will help myself to talk of possible worlds here to draw this threefold distinction. First, by *matter-of-factual* structure, I mean to be speaking of the structure of that obtains in the actual world, insofar as it is the way it actually is. So this structure consists in the things in the actual world instantiating the properties that they actually do and standing in the relations that they actually do to other things in the actual world. For instance, the fact that a is gray, means that a is not black, and the additional fact that b is black means that a is lighter than b. By *metaphysical* structure, I mean to be speaking

of the structure that obtains across all possible worlds. So an object x's being gray is incompatible with x's being black, an object x's being black and another object y's being gray entails that x is darker than y, and so on. This structure is instantiated by every possible world insofar as that world is genuinely possible, independent of the matters of fact that distinguish one possible world from the next. Finally, by *categorical* structure, I mean to be speaking of the structure that obtains in anything that has the right sort of constituents to be able to count as a possible world at all; in the system of categories we are working with here, it is the structure of objects, properties, relations, and states of affairs. An object x can instantiate a property P but it cannot instantiate another object y. If an object x is identical to an object y, then y is identical to x. If x stands in a relation R to an object y and R is a symmetric relation, then y stands in R to x. On the reading of the Myth of the Given that I am proposing here, one is committed to an instance of the Myth of the Given insofar as one (explicitly or implicitly) takes *any* of these sorts of structures to impose itself on the mind from without.

To see how this way of thinking about the Myth is supposed to work, let us start by applying this way of thinking about the Myth to what Sellars regards as, though not its most basic form, one of its clearest forms. Sellars begins *EPM* by pointing out an "ambiguity in sense data theories." The ambiguity consists in the fact that it is taken to be *particulars* that are sensed, but, when sensed, *facts* that are known. Indeed, this ambiguity is necessary for the theory to be the version of epistemological foundationalism that is supposed to be. In order for the theory to function, a sense datum, a particular which can be picked out demonstratively as some"this," must be something that, upon being sensed, entails knowledge of the form "x is ϕ," where ϕ is a general concept. For instance, sensing a red sense datum, a, must entail knowledge of the fact that a is red. Now, knowing that a is red requires knowing what it is for something to be red, and, in order to know that, one must know such things as that if something is crimson, then it

is red, that if something is red, then it is colored, that if something is red, then it cannot be green, and so on. One need not know all such things, but if one did not know any such things, thereby being able reason to and from one's knowledge that *a* is red, one's "knowledge" that *a* is red would not be knowledge. To speak of something as knowledge is to classify it as a cognitive achievement, but this purported "cognitive achievement" would be one that does *nothing*, cognitively speaking; it would be incapable of playing a role in our cognitive activity, serving as something from which and to which we can reason. So, to know that *a* is red, one must grasp a bit of matter-of-factual structure to which this fact belongs, knowing that *a* is colored, that *a* isn't green, and so on. So, the sense-data theorist, in being committed to a view in which facts such as the fact that *a* is red are simply impressed upon the mind in virtue of one's sensing a particular red sensory item, is committed to a view in which the matter-of-factual structure of the world, a structured set of facts, imposes itself on the mind as a seal imposes an image on melted wax. On my reading of what the Myth of the Given is, it is in virtue of just this feature that the sense data theory that Sellars considers at the beginning of *EPM* is an instance of the Myth.

Once again, Sellars does not take the incarnation of the Myth of the Given that is present in the sense data theorist he considers at the beginning of the *EPM* to be a particularly *deep* form of the Myth of the Given. He introduces it at the beginning because he takes it to be a particularly *clear* form of the Myth. The clarity of the problem, in this case, is due to the fact that it generates a clear inconsistence in the empiricist view Sellars is considering, which he lays out in his famous "inconsistent triad." The sense-data theorist he is imagining wants to say (1) that the capacity to sense sense data is *innate*, something that a human being has simply in virtue of being conscious, (2) that the capacity to deploy concepts such as *red*, which may be applied to such data, is *acquired*, paradigmatically through the learning of language, and (3) that the sensing of sense data entails

knowing facts of the form *that x is* ϕ (for instance, the sensing of a red sense datum x entails knowing that x is red). Saying any two of these things precludes one from being able to say the third. The problem, in this particular case, is that Sellars's sense data theorist is in empiricist, and thus someone who takes it that conceptual understanding *is not* imposed upon a subject from without, but is committed to a picture in which it *must* be imposed upon a subject from without. Now, Sellars agrees with the empiricist commitment of his sense-data theorist, that conceptual understanding is not imposed upon a subject from without. His response to this problem for the empiricist is to fully radicalize this point of agreement, claiming that *nothing* of which we have knowledge, not even what the empiricist conceives of as mere sensory awareness, can be imposed upon a subject from without. That is the core claim that constitutes the rejection of the Myth of the Given.

But what is actually *wrong* with the Myth of the Given? What is the argument against it? I take it that there is a simple line of reasoning that shows the Myth to be not merely wrong, but simply confused. The initial thought is that, if any of our knowledge of reality is intellegible to us as such (that is to say, intellegible to us *as knowledge of reality*), we must be able to think of what we hold of reality, in taking ourselves to know some bit of reality, as something that we hold rationally. Given this initial thought, if follows from a simple line of reasoning that we could not possibly have knowledge of some bit of reality through its being imposed upon us from without, since, if it was, we'd would be precluded from being able to think of what we hold of reality in grasping that bit of it as something that we hold rationally. To hold something rationally is to hold it in virtue of grasping the reasons for it. That is, holding something rationally is holding it in virtue of comprehending why it is to be held. Holding something rationally, then, is holding it through one's own act—an act of freedom, or, as Kant would say, spontaneity. Now, anything that one holds through an imposition from without is surely not something that one holds through one's own act. Accordingly, nothing

that one holds of the world through an imposition of it on one's mind can be something that one holds rationally. Since knowledge is essentially an act of rationality, there can be no knowledge that is had through worldly imposition. This idea of the Given is a myth. This simple but sound line of reasoning is, I think, the basic line of reasoning underlying Sellars's rejection of the Myth of the Given.

As I've put things here, rejecting the Myth is simply rejecting any conception of our knowledge of the world, inner or outer, in which it is conceived of as something other than an exercise of our rational capacities, imposed rather than free. Here is nice way of putting the basic thought that constitutes the rejection of the Myth of the Given, from John McDowell:

> Sellars's guiding thought is that any knowledge possessed by rational subjects, including their perceptually grounded knowledge, is an act of capacities that belong to what figures in Kant as the higher cognitive faculty, the faculty that distinguishes rational subjects from merely sentient beings (A835/B863). A conception of things given to rational subjects for knowing is a case of the Myth if getting what is given is not conceived as an act of such capacities.

The basic line of reasoning that I have sketched above, which underlies this guiding thought, is I think, a simple one. It is less of an "argument" and more of a clarification of a potential confusion. Once one is clear on what the Myth of the Given is, there is no substantive reasoning that one must do in order to see what is wrong with it.[10] Nevertheless, a certain sort of explanatory project can tempt

[10]I am expressing an agreement with James Conant here, though I think the terms in which he puts things can be somewhat misleading. Conant writes,

> If we do try to sum up the most general form of the Myth [. . .] then we are bound to end up saying something that essentially has the form of the negation of a tautology.

On my construal, the relevant "tautology" of which the Myth of the Given is would be the negation might be put as follows: Knowledge of the world, a free act of rationality, cannot be something that is imposed upon oneself from without. I say that Conant's claim is potentially misleading because, while there is, I think, *a* sense in which this might be called a "tautology," it is certainly not a tautology as logic textbooks use the term.

one into such a Mythical picture. Generally, one is led into the Myth when one attempts to give an account of some aspect of our rational capacities as dependent on some sort of knowledge or awareness that, given the explanatory project for which it is recruited, must be conceived of as not involving an actualization of the rational capacities that it does in fact involve. The problematic structure of Givenness here is nicely stated by John McDowell (2009) as follows:

> Givenness in the sense of the Myth would be an availability for cognition to subjects whose getting what is supposedly Given to them does not draw on capacities required for the sort of cognition in question.

If one is committed to such an explanatory structure, they face the following dilemma. On the one hand, they can continue to fail to acknowledge the contribution of rational capacities whose actualization is in fact essentially involved in the "knowledge" they appeal to in order to explain these capacities, and thus are straddled with a view in which the sort of knowledge that they take to underlie the capacities they are trying to explain is *unintelligible*. On the other hand, they can acknowledge the capacities that the knowledge they appeal to in order to explain these very capacities does in fact essentially involve, and thus are straddled with a view in which their account of these capacities is *incoherent*, suffering from a fatal circularity.

Now, McDowell, following Kant, emphasizes that our rational capacities are essentially *conceptual* capacities. Sellars's is a Kantian that has undergone a linguistic turn. The crucial point for Sellars is that our conceptual capacities are essentially *linguistic* capacities. As he puts it "grasping a concept is always mastering the use of a word." Having these points in view, we can the chain of reasoning by which Sellars reaches his "psychological nominalism." If Sellars is right to follow Kant in thinking that awareness of anything of any cognitive significance requires the deployment of concepts, and the deployment of concepts is essentially a linguistic affair, then it follows that "all awareness of sorts, resemblances,

facts, etc., in short, all awareness of abstract entities—indeed, all awareness even of particulars—is a linguistic affair" (63). With this claim on board, it is not hard to see what the problem for worldly semantics, from Sellarsian perspective, is. The problem for worldly semantics is that semantic competence is supposed to be explained as depending on of knowledge of the world. This explanatory structure presupposed here requires that knowledge of the world *does not* presuppose semantic competence. However, insofar as this worldly knowledge is an act of rational capacities, rational capacities are essentially conceptual capacities, and grasping a concept is always mastering the use of a word, this knowledge *does* presuppose semantic competence. To put the problem in terms of McDowell's formulation of the problematic structure of Givenness, In articulating a worldly semantics for a language that some subjects speak, we aim to explain their capacity to use and understand sentences of their language as depending on their having a certain sort of worldly knowledge, but their having the sort of worldly knowledge that we suppose them to have depends on their capacity to use and understand sentences of their language.

Now, as I said above, to limit the scope of my discussion here, I have focused my attention on one aspect of our semantic competence that is supposed to be explained by a worldly semantic theory: our knowledge of facts consisting in sentences standing in relations of entailment and incompatibility to one another in virtue of meaning what they do. On a worldly semantics, this knowledge is taken to be asymmetrically dependent on knowledge of the structure of the world at the middle level in the formulation of the Myth of the Given that I have specified above: what I have called "metaphysical structure." Worldly semantic frameworks, of both the extra- and intra-worldly variety are ultimately committed to a view in which the metaphysical structure of the world, be it articulated in terms of facts consisting in set-theoretic relations obtaining between extra-worldly entities or primitive modal relations obtaining between intra-worldly

entities, imposes itself on the mind, and, accordingly preclude us from being able able to non-circularly comprehend the worldly knowledge which is supposed to underlie our knowledge of meaning as genuinely knowledge. Of course, so far, I have just stated this claim. I have not yet given any argument that worldly semantic theories are problematic in the way that I have claimed they are. That is what I will do in the next two chapters, arguing against the two most common incarnations of worldly semantics in the contemporary literature. Before I begin my attack on worldly semantics, however, I want to clarify my targets, especially "extra-worldly semantics," at which I will take aim in the next chapter.

1.7 Elucidatory and Explanatory Models in Semantics

Extra-worldly semantics is by far the most common type of semantics practiced by contemporary semantic theorists. Such a semantic theory, if taken to constitute an explanation of what it is in which speakers' knowledge of meaning consists, will be the clearest instance of the Myth we'll consider, the first incarnation of the Myth to be exposed as such. Many semantic theorists who employ such a framework, however, phrase what they are doing in such a way so as to not commit themselves the claim that they really are *explaining* the knowledge of meaning that speakers have. Rather, they often put things so as to suggest that they are doing something else: *elucidating* or *explicating* this knowledge of meaning. Rarely, however, are theorists explicit about what this distinction is or what falling on one side of it rather than the other amounts to.

Consider, for instance, what Chierchia and McConnell-Ginet (1990) say in their introductory textbook when sensing possible trepidation from their scientifically-minded reader about the appeal to "possible worlds" in the semantic theory:

> [U]sing the formal framework of possible worlds in semantics has produced some very interesting and nontrivial accounts of various intensional phenomena, and many quite enlightening semantic studies

> have been generated. It certainly seems to us a fruitful hypothesis that our semantic competence can be elucidated in this framework, (207-208).

Chierchia and McConnell-Ginnet say here that it seems to them to be a fruitful hypothesis that our semantic competence can be *elucidated* in the framework of possible worlds. They do not say that it seems to them that our semantic competence can be *explained* with the use of such a framework. When they originally lay our what their aim, as linguists is at the beginning of the book, they do so in such a way as to suggest that they are uncomfortable about the use of the expression "explain" in this context

> [A]s linguists, our focus is on modeling the cognitive systems whose operation in some sense "explains" linguistic phenomena.

They never say in *what* sense the operation of the cognitive systems they seek to model "explains" the linguistic phenomena with which they concern, and they never say why they put the expression "explains" is scare-quotes here. As they proceed in the book, this issue gets lost entirely. They drop this guardedness about the use of the expression "explains," and freely talk about the semantic theory "explaining" and "accounting for" empirical phenomena such as "judgments of semantic relatedness," using these expressions more or less interchangeably (51). This wavering between an elucidatory and an explanatory conception of semantics makes it difficult to determine to what extent the theories put forward by Chierchia and McConnel-Ginnet are targets of the attack on extra-worldly semantics put forth in next chapter. I do not deny that our semantic competence can be *elucidated* with the use of a framework that central employs the notion of possible worlds. Indeed, I think it can be, and I think that this elucidation can indeed be enlightening. What I am denying is that our semantic competence can be *explained* with the use of such a framework. This crucial distinction, I believe, is often lost in contemporary theorizing about meaning, and it is this tendency of

contemporary theorists to lose this distinction that is largely responsible for the pervasiveness of the Myth in contemporary theorizing about meaning.

One way to get the distinction between semantic theories that aim at elucidation and those that aim at explanation into view is to consider whether a certain sort of circularity is acceptable in the theory. A circular explanation, in which the facts that are supposed to be explained are appealed to in order to arrive at the "explanation" of them, is no explanation at all. If a semantic theorist is able to rest happily while being aware of circularity in their theory, then it is a good bet that they take themselves to be doing elucidatory rather than explanatory work. One such theorist is, Jaako Hintikka (1975), who, when considering the question of whether possible worlds could only be understood by reference to counterfactual claims which would then be understood in terms of a possible worlds semantics, writes,

> [A] circle of explication need not be a vicious one, provided it is wide enough to enable a logician to uncover nontrivial aspects of the structure of the concepts involved, (135).[11]

Here, Hintikka uses the term "explication" rather than the term "explanation," and this, of course, is no accident. A circle of *explanation* can only be a vicious one, but a circle of *explication* or *elucidation* need not be vicious. Stina Backstrom provides a clear statement of how at least some elucidations might be virtuously rather than viciously circular:

> There is [. . .] at least one kind of case in which a philosophical account can be circular without fault, and that is when the account aims at elucidating two concepts or phenomena that are mutually interdependent. In that case, circularity—far from being a deficiency—is a necessary feature of a successful account, (2016,).

If worldly knowledge and semantic knowledge are mutually interdependent, then it is possible that they can be mutually elucidated by an account that appeals

[11] I should note, Hintikka himself does not "official" make this claim. It actually occurs in the context of a fictional dialogue with Quine, but it is clear that it represents Hintikka's own view.

to one in explicating the other and vice versa. This is essentially how conceptions of possible worlds that define them with the use of "meaning postulates" suggest that we think of things (whether the proponents of such conceptions know that they are suggesting this or not). I will discuss such conceptions in more detail in the next chapter, but the point of bringing them here is just to show what a self-consciously elucidatory rather than explanatory conception of worldly semantics could be. On such a conception, our semantic knowledge is explicated as depending on our worldly knowledge, but this worldly knowledge is analyzed in terms of our knowledge of relations among sets of possible worlds, and possible worlds are defined as depending on our semantic knowledge, made explicit by the laying down of "meaning postulates." Clearly, a possible worlds semantics that is structured in this way will not be able to explain or account for the knowledge of meaning that we have, since this knowledge must be appealed to in order to define the materials with which the theory is constructed, but it may very well be able to uncover non-trivial structural features of the meanings of which we have knowledge through the mutual elucidation of our semantic knowledge and our worldly knowledge.

If elucidating structural features of our semantic knowledge is all you are aiming to do in employing a possible worlds semantics, and you recognize the space for a semantic theory that actually explains this semantic knowledge, then you and I have no quarrel. There are many ends other than explanatory ones that a possible worlds semantics the elucidates the structure of the space of meanings of which we have knowledge can aid us in the pursuit of, and, even in the context of an explanatory project, an elucidatory semantic theory can function to get the explandum into view, and an explanatory theory can function to explain it. The great merit of an extra-worldly semantic framework is that it enables us to provide characterizations of semantic relations and semantic operations in set-theoretic terms. For instance, it enables us to provide a characterization of the

semantic relations of as entailment and incompatibility and semantic operations of conjunction and negation in terms of the set-theoretic relations of being a subset of and being disjoint and the set-theoretic operations of intersection and complementation. Once again, I don't deny that the structure of the semantic relations that complex sentences stand to one another can be elucidated set-theoretically by thinking of the sentences that stand in these relations and their parts as having sets of possible worlds and related mathematical entities as their semantic values. What I deny is that to assign sets of possible worlds to sentences is to model their meaning in such a way that enables us to explain that they stand in these semantic relations or our knowledge that they do.

Because the distinction between elucidation and explanation gets lost, many semanticists take themselves to be explaining our knowledge of meaning when all they can be doing is elucidating it, and this leads them to take their to be no room for semantic theories that really are of the sort to be able to explain it. For instance, Paul Portner (2005), in his introductory textbook to formal semantics, relevantly entitled *What Is Meaning?*, says that one of the main reasons for thinking of meaning in terms of a possible worlds semantics of the sort introduced here is that this sort of semantics "lets us define some basic semantic concepts: synonymy, contriety, entailment, contradiction, tautology," (18). Portner makes this claim in the course of arguing that possible worlds semantics, as opposed to the holist empiricist semantics proposed by W.V. Quine (1953, 1960) or the social-normative semantics proposed by Robert Brandom (1994, 2000), is the sort of semantic theory with we should think about what meaning is (Portner 2005, 4-22).[12] Possible worlds semantics, Portner claims on behalf of mainstream formal semantics, gives us a better account of what meaning is than the sort of semantic theories proposed by Quine or Brandom. If all possible worlds semantics is doing, however, is

[12]It is worth noting that, while Portner drops a footnote to Quine's "Two Dogmas" and *Word and Object* (2005), it is hard to see how the view he characterizes as Quine's really is Quine's. He seems to be failing to discriminate Quine's empiricist holism from Brandom's rationalist holism.

elucidating and not explaning, then possible worlds semantics does not give us a better account of what meaning is than the sorts of theories proposed by Quine or Brandom because it gives us no account of meaning at all.

By the end of this dissertation, I will have articulated the basics of a framework that can actually function to account for what meaning is and what it is for us to have the knowledge of meaning that we do. In contrast to the worldly semantic frameworks I will argue against in the next two chapters, the framework I will propose will not be undergirded by speakers' having worldly knowledge, thus implicitly appealing to the very knowledge of meaning for which the theory is supposed to account. It will turn out that, rather than our semantic knowledge *depending* on our "worldly" knowledge, our "worldly" knowledge really is nothing other than our semantic knowledge, expressed in a worldly mode. After revealing the "worldly" knowledge to which worldly semantic theories appeal to not really be worldly knowledge at all, I will then lay out a non-mythical conception of the relation between language and the world. But first things first: I must argue that worldly semantics, of both the extra- and intra-worldly variety, really is a Mythical framework.