



# Temporal externalism, conceptual continuity, meaning, and use

Henry Jackman

Department of Philosophy, York University, Toronto, Canada

## ABSTRACT

Our ascriptions of content to past utterances assign to them a level of conceptual continuity and determinacy that extends beyond what could be grounded in the usage up to their time of utterance. If one accepts such ascriptions, one can argue either (1) that future use must be added to the grounding base, or (2) that such cases show that meaning is not, ultimately, grounded in use. The following will defend the first option as the more promising of the two, though this ultimately requires understanding the relation between use and meaning as ‘normative’ in two important ways. The first (more familiar) way is that the function from use to meaning must be of a sort that allows us to maintain a robust distinction between actual and correct use. The second sort of normativity is unique to theories that extend the grounding base into the future. In particular, if meaning is partially a function of future use, we can see our commitment to the ‘determinacy’ of meaning as a practical commitment that structures our linguistic practices rather than a theoretical commitment that merely describes them.

**KEYWORDS** Semantic externalism; normativity; determinacy; meaning and use

## 1. Introduction

The claim that facts about meaning are grounded in facts about use is something of a philosophical commonplace, and this ‘grounding thesis’ can be expressed as:

**U:** The use of a word determines its meaning.

However, just how **U** should be interpreted is often unclear. Its status as a commonplace stems at least in part from the fact that ‘the use of a word’ and ‘determine’ (to say nothing of ‘meaning’) can be interpreted in many different ways, and **U** is typically reinterpreted rather than rejected when we are confronted with phenomena that do not sit well with **U** as it had been previously understood.

**CONTACT** Henry Jackman  [hjackman@icloud.com](mailto:hjackman@icloud.com)

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For instance, for much of the last century **U** was understood under what could be called a 'currentist' interpretation according to which the meaning of a word at a time was taken to be grounded upon how it was used at that time. On such a reading, **U** would be more explicitly cashed out as:

**CU:** The *current* use of a word determines its (current) meaning.

**CU** itself can be understood in various ways. For instance, **CU** can be understood in an *internalist* way in which the only usage relevant to meaning is that describable in terms of stimuli and responses that could be shared by an exact duplicate of ours who lived in an environment different from ours in various unperceived ways. On the other hand, use can be understood in a non-internalist (or 'indexical') way according to which the use of a word includes the actual environment in which it occurs, so that if I apply 'water' to a substance that happens to be H<sub>2</sub>O, and my twin applies it to a substance that happens to be XYZ, we are using the term differently, even if neither of us could tell H<sub>2</sub>O and XYZ apart.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, the 'use' in **CU** can be understood in *individualist* way according to which the only use relevant to what a speaker means is their own use, or a non-individualist way in which the relevant use is that of their *entire community*.<sup>2</sup> Further, current use can be taken to encompass only how the speaker *actually* uses the word, or to also include how he or she is *disposed* to use it at that time of utterance. The dispositionalist, non-internalistic and non-individualist interpretation readings will hereafter presumed to hold for the versions of **U** discussed.<sup>3</sup>

**CU** came to grief when the thought experiments of Saul Kripke, Tyler Burge and Hillary Putnam showed that two people or communities whose current use of a word were exactly the same (in even an 'indexical' sense) could still mean different things by that word. Consequently, **U** was reinterpreted as:

**PCU:** The *past and current* use of a word determines its (current) meaning.

Of course, Kripke and Putnam were also understood as illustrating the importance of our *environment*, but that could, as mentioned above, be captured by an indexical interpretation of **CU**. The important point for

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<sup>1</sup>I assume here that the details of this case are familiar from Putnam (1975).

<sup>2</sup>For the best-known defense of the non-individualist position, see Burge (1979).

<sup>3</sup>Indeed, anyone who rejects the ascriptions that motivate such non-internalistic and non-individualistic ascriptions will almost surely be willing to reject the sorts of continuity-driven ascriptions upon which this essay is focused. I'll also be assuming, with all of the authors discussed here, that changes in a word's extension correspond to changes in its meaning.

the purposes of this paper (which was more obvious with proper names than with natural kind terms) was that the meanings of our terms didn't (at least immediately) switch when our environment did, so reference was *historical* in the sense that it was the environment in which the term was *originally* used that typically determined its meaning.<sup>4</sup>

We say 'typically' because these historical accounts, while stressing the presumption of conceptual *continuity* between us and our predecessors,<sup>5</sup> still needed to provide some story about conceptual *change* as well. No defender of the historical view ever suggested that past usage fixed what we meant in a way that current usage was *inexorably* bound by it, and it was always recognized that we needed to account for the fact that, say, 'meat' now means *animal flesh* rather than *solid food in general*, in spite of the fact that it was used historically in the later sense. While the actual mechanism was often left unspecified,<sup>6</sup> it was still presumed that there would be some sort of story about how meaning could change over time.

However, while these 'historical' accounts put a lot of weight on the continuity between our meanings and those of our predecessors, even **PCU** cannot keep up with all the conceptual continuity presupposed by our ascriptional practices. In particular, our everyday ascriptions of content treat the content of our thoughts and utterances as sensitive to contingent linguistic developments that take place *after* the utterances in question.<sup>7</sup>

To take one frequently discussed example, consider the case of 'gold'.<sup>8</sup> Prior to developments in modern chemistry, the standard tests for being gold (malleability, dissolvability in *aqua regia*, etc.) were satisfied by platinum as well. When tests were developed in the eighteenth century that could distinguish gold from platinum, platinum made up a tiny proportion

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<sup>4</sup>See Burge (1982) for a clear argument for why terms like "water" need a 'historical' rather than merely 'indexical' interpretation.

<sup>5</sup>This was most obvious in Putnam's work, which emerged within the context of debates in the philosophy of science about whether the meanings of scientific terms were preserved through changes in scientific theories. (See, for instance, Putnam 1965, 1975, 1981).

<sup>6</sup>Though see Evans (1973) for an account of such changes of meaning within the context of something like **PCU**, and Jackman (2015) for a development of such an account within the more 'Davidsonian' meta-semantic framework endorsed here.

<sup>7</sup>See, for instance (Ball 2018, 2020; [this volume], Collins 2006, 2011; Ebbs 1997, 2000, 2009; Haukioja [this volume]; Jackman 1996, 1999, 2005; Lance 2000; Lance and Hawthorn 1990, 1997, Martí and Ramírez-Ludeña (forthcoming), Rouse 2014; Stoneham 2003; Tanesini 2006, 2014; Wilson 2000, as well as possibly Koethe 1982; Rouse 1987). The existence of such temporally loaded content ascriptions is also noted, but not endorsed, in Wilson (1982), Donnellan (1983) and Sorensen (1997).

<sup>8</sup>For a more extended discussion of this case, (see Donnellan 1983; Ebbs 2000, 2009; Wilson 2000; Jackman 2005). That said, I wouldn't want to hang too much on the details of this particular case, which is of a sort that Wilson argues occurs "in virtually every case of enlargement of our world view through scientific progress" (Wilson 1982, 572).

of the purported samples of ‘gold’, and so platinum was considered a substance that was mistaken for gold rather than a variety of it. In the 1920s large deposits of platinum were discovered in South Africa’s Bushveld Complex, and were subsequently brought in to circulation, but since the distinction between gold and platinum was already in place by then, the South African deposits were classified as platinum rather than gold. However, if the Bushveld platinum deposits had been brought in to circulation *before* the development of modern chemistry, there might have been enough platinum in the ‘gold’ supply for both platinum and gold to be considered different *types* of ‘gold’ in the way that nephrite and jadeite are considered different types of jade. We take seventeenth century speakers to be talking about *gold* with the word ‘gold’, but if history had developed a little differently after their utterance, our counterparts would have interpreted them as making claims that were true of *gold* or *platinum*.

One way to respond to such cases is to treat our everyday ascriptions of conceptual continuity as mistaken, and say that our predecessors meant something *indeterminate* by ‘gold’, so that, strictly speaking, we should not assign beliefs to them using our concept *gold* because the meaning of the term has changed in virtue of being made more determinate.<sup>9</sup> The other way is to accept what I will call here ‘**Continuity**’, the view which endorse such ascriptions, and with them the assumption that meaning and conceptual content remain unchanged in these cases. Supporters of **Continuity** seem faced with two choices with respect to **U**. The first of these is to reinterpret **U** so that it fits this aspect of our practice, leaving one with something like:

**PCFU:** The *past, current and future* use of a word determines its (current) meaning.<sup>10</sup>

The second is to claim that the problem is not with the *interpretation* of **U**, but with **U** itself, and thus that we should give up on the grounding thesis altogether.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup>See Field (1973) and Wilson (1982) for versions of this approach.

<sup>10</sup>Versions of PCFU are defended in (Ball 2018; [this volume], Collins 2006, 2011; Haukioja [this volume]; Jackman 1996, 1999; Stoneham 2003; Wilson 2000, and possibly Rouse 2014).

<sup>11</sup>Ebbs, for instance, takes the legitimacy of the **Continuity**-ascriptions to be in conflict with the “metaphysical principle” that “The use of a word determines its extension” (Ebbs 2000, 245). See also, (Ebbs 2009; Lance and Hawthorne 1997); and possibly Tanesini 2014 and Rouse 2014. (It is unclear whether these last two rule out *all* versions of **U**, or just those that presuppose a *reductive* account of the relation between use and meaning (see Tanesini 2014, 12; Rouse 2014, 26)).

The following will defend a version of **PCFU**, a view that I've elsewhere referred to as 'Temporal Externalism',<sup>12</sup> and with it the assumption that meaning is grounded in use. Typically a defense of **PCFU** would be against criticisms that denied **Continuity**, and presupposed some version of **PCU**,<sup>13</sup> but this paper will defend **PCFU** against those who might think that the acceptance **Continuity** should lead to the denial of **U** instead. In particular, it will focus on two purported reasons for thinking that **Continuity** should lead us to reject **U** rather than move to **PCFU**. The grounding thesis will, I believe, hold up against these attacks, though preserving it will require adopting a non-standard (though to my mind independently plausible) interpretation of the 'determination' relation involved in **U**.

## 2. The 'normativity' of meaning

One reason that some defenders of **Continuity** reject all versions of **U**, including **PCFU**, is that they take **U** to be unable to capture the 'normativity' of meaning. As Ebbs puts it, **PCFU** should be rejected because of its tendency to 'collapse the distinction between belief and truth.'

[T]here is a ... problem with futurism [**PCFU**]: it presupposes that our uses of a word at some future time can settle its denotation at that future time. Just as our present uses of our words were once only future uses of our words, so future uses of our words will be someday be present uses of our words. Futurism therefore implies that when certain future uses become present, a version of presentism becomes true. For reasons I will explain, however, no version of presentism, including futurism, is acceptable.

The deepest problem with presentism is that it collapses the logical distinction between belief and truth. Contrary to what presentism requires, our agreements about how to use our words, no matter how firmly entrenched, do not guarantee that the beliefs we express by using those words are true. (Ebbs 2003, 7–8)

Similar worries are expressed by Hawthorn, Lance, Rouse and Tanesini.<sup>14</sup> However, claiming that meaning depends on future usage isn't incompatible with saying that that future usage could incorporate mistakes, since the idea that future usage helps determine meaning does not imply that

<sup>12</sup>Jackman (1996, 1999, 2004, 2005, 2006).

<sup>13</sup>See, for instance, (Jackman 1996, 1999, 2005).

<sup>14</sup>See Lance (2000, 126–127), Lance and Hawthorne (1997, 196), Rouse (2014, 25), and Tanesini (2014, 4). (see also Sawyer [this volume]).

there need be some point in the future where usage can be *equated* with meaning. Lance and Hawthorn, for instance, claim that ‘The natural reading of [PCFU] is that meaning claims are some sort of high-level, functional description of structures of usage as they exist in a community across time, including future times,’<sup>15</sup> but as understood here, **PCFU**, isn’t committed to this sort of *reductive* story about who use and meaning are related.

While Ebbs, Hawthorn, Lance, Tanesini and Rouse are all certainly right to point out that future use is only *prima facie* correct, and that we need to allow for future use to be mistaken, this is nothing special about *future* use, and it will be true of the conception of use relevant to *any* plausible version of **U**. For instance, most defenses of **CU** don’t take it to commit one to saying that every aspect of current usage must be correct. Indeed, most versions of **CU** try to explain how, even if current use determines meaning, at least some aspects of current use can be understood as mistaken (much the same could be said of **PCU**).<sup>16</sup> In particular, one can take meaning to be a function of use but understand this function to be a *normative* one.<sup>17</sup> To take a familiar example, one could follow Donald Davidson and endorse some version of the principle of ‘charity’ according to which the semantic values of our terms will be those that ‘maximize’ the truth of the commitments embodied in our use. If meaning is produced by this sort of function, then any aspect of our use, no matter how stable it is, can turn out to be in error if the meaning assignment that best maximizes the amount of truth in the whole would treat it as mistaken.<sup>18</sup> Consequently, one can agree that meaning ascriptions are about how speakers *should* use their terms rather than descriptions of how they *do* use them, and still insist that how our terms *are* used determines how they *should* be used. For instance if we discovered the relevant chemical test for gold and defined it as we do now, we would mean *gold* by gold, even if we, in fact, *never* subjected any samples of platinum to this test (so that platinum samples remained in the set of things we actually applied ‘gold’ to). Developments in our usage can thus settle that a certain item will fall within the

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<sup>15</sup>Lance and Hawthorne (1997, 196).

<sup>16</sup>Some of these attempts could be understood as ‘reductive’ in the sense that meaning ascriptions just describe some naturalistically specifiable subset of actual use (see, for instance Dretske (1981, 1986), Fodor (1987, 1990).), but there is no reason to think that even **CU** (or **PCU**) need commit one to this sort of reductionism about meaning (see, for instance, Jackman 2003a, 2003b). The worry about some form of reductionism being associated with **U** is most central in Tanesini (2006, 2014).

<sup>17</sup>Or at least a non-reductive one (for a case for distinguishing the normative from the merely non-reductive here, see Glüer and Wikforss 2018).

<sup>18</sup>See Jackman (2003a, 2003b). This is variant of the Principle of Charity is closer to Wilson’s original (1959) formulation than to the one more familiar from Davidson 1984.

extension or anti-extension of one of our terms without our ever becoming aware of this.

Just as a defender of the Principle of Charity who endorses **CU** (or **PCU**) has the resources to say that much (past and) contemporary usage is mistaken, the **PCFU**-friendly philosopher need not require that there ever be a time in the future when actual use can be *equated* with correct use.<sup>19</sup> **PCFU** may expand the range of *inputs* into the function from use to meaning, but the function itself can stay normative. The criticisms above seem to characterize the defender of **PCFU** as endorsing the claim that meaning statements are merely *descriptions* of regularities in use, and it is this non-normative understanding of the ‘determination’ relation in **U** that would ultimately make any version of it seem unacceptable.<sup>20</sup> However, if the determination is taken to be normative one, then **PCFU** seems immune to the objections brought against the purely descriptive version above.

### 3. Branching

Perhaps the most serious challenge that **Continuity** presents to **PCFU** (or any version of **U**), relates to how it interacts with the ‘open texture’ of our concepts. This open texture is stressed by both Tanesini and Rouse,<sup>21</sup> but the challenge it brings is presented most clearly by Ebbs:

[T]here is an ever-present possibility of branching: for any given pattern of applications of a term, different characterizations of the extension of the term are possible, and may lead to different applications of the term ... in such cases there is no independent criterion for determining which characterization of the extension of the term is correct. I conclude that the use of a term never determines its extension, and hence no version of [**U**] is correct. (Ebbs 2000, 260)<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup>Thinking otherwise may be encouraged by the fact that **PCFU** is often motivated by examples where the relevant usage is entirely correct and so could seem like it was, on its own, enough to determine meaning. That is, the futures involve cases where the extension of "Grant's Zebra" (Wilson 1982; Jackman 1996, 1999), "Witch" (Lance and Hawthorn 1990, 1997), or "Gold" (Wilson 2000; Jackman 2005) could be determined by someone who just looked at the future usage and nothing else. However, future use is typically depicted as coextensive with correct use just as a means to help with the exposition of these cases, and their being coextensive isn't part of the view being defended. In much the same way, social externalism is typically motivated by considering cases where the socially accepted use can be understood as free from error (see Burge 1979) even though this is in no way an essential part of the view (see Burge 1986).

<sup>20</sup>Tanesini (2014), presents precisely this as the problem with the particular version of **PCFU** found in Stoneham (2003).

<sup>21</sup>Rouse (2014, 26–27), Tanesini (2006, 201–202, 2014, 14–17).

<sup>22</sup>Ebbs also agrees with Donnellan's (1983) claim that any view like **PCFU** would be "outrageously bizarre" (Ebbs 2000, 258). However, unlike Donnellan, he agrees that two groups of people, whose physical environment, internal states and usage up to time *t* are just the same could still mean something

If the sort of branching characteristic of, say, the ‘gold’ case is always possible, then it might seem as if future use could *never* settle what we mean by our terms, since no matter how much use was added, some underdetermination would always remain. If the possibility of branching is ‘ever-present’, usage would never be able to produce completely determinate meanings.

Of course, the fact that branching is always possible would only undermine **U** if we thought that the meanings of our terms were ‘determinate’. That is, if we thought that there was a fact of the matter, for any possible instance, about whether it did, or didn’t, fall under the term. Fortunately for Ebbs, there is a long tradition in thinking about meaning that argues for precisely this assumption. Frege, for instance, suggested that the meanings of our terms (or at least our concepts) had to be completely determinate,<sup>23</sup> and the view has recently been brought back to prominence by Timothy Williamson.<sup>24</sup> Ebbs may not be sympathetic to Williamson’s commitment to **U**,<sup>25</sup> but he does seem to endorse conceptual determinacy, and from this determinacy he builds an argument against **U**.

Ebbs argues that for any version of **U**, including **PCFU**, the following form an inconsistent triad.

**Determinacy:** Meanings must be completely determinate.

**Branching:** At any point in time, usage is compatible with multiple meaning assignments.

**U:** Use determines meaning.<sup>26</sup>

In suggesting that **U** the member of the triad that must go, Ebbs can be grouped with contemporary ‘soft’-epistemicists about vagueness like Paul Horwich and Roy Sorensen, in that all three justify their holding on

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different by their terms at *t* even if the only difference between them were accidental occurrences that took place after that time. Donnellan rejects **Continuity** along with **PCFU**, and since most of the ‘bizarreness’ of **PCFU** arguably comes from **Continuity**, Ebbs needs some more principled reason for giving up on **PCFU**.

<sup>23</sup>The law of excluded middle is really just another form of the requirement that the concept should have a sharp boundary. To a concept without a sharp boundary there would correspond an area that had not a sharp boundary-line all around, but in places just vaguely faded away into the background. This would not really be an area at all; and likewise a concept that is not sharply defined is wrongly termed a concept.” (Frege 1952, 159).

<sup>24</sup>Williamson (1992, 1994). (See also Sorensen 1988, 2001).

<sup>25</sup>Williamson argues that our usage (indeed, our usage even as understood as **PCU**) is enough to produce completely determinate meanings (even if the way it does so is “unsurveyably chaotic” (Williamson 1992, 275, 1994, 209)).

<sup>26</sup>See Tanesini (2006, 200–203, 2014, 13–15) for similar commitment to the importance of both open texture and determinacy.

to **Determinacy** by denying **U**.<sup>27</sup> By contrast, one could deny **Branching** (as do 'hard'-epistemicists such as Williamson),<sup>28</sup> or simply deny **Determinacy** (as do most non-epistemicists about vagueness).<sup>29</sup>

Rather than taking sides as to which of **Determinacy**, **Branching** or **U** must be given up, it will be argued here that **PCFU** makes it possible to understand **Determinacy** in a way that allows one to hold on to all three.<sup>30</sup> To see how, we can start by noting that most of our claims can be viewed as embodying 'theoretical' commitments about the way that the world is in the sense that what we commit ourselves to is independent of our taking on that commitment. When I claim that there are two cartons of milk in my fridge right now, the fact that I'm making a claim about is independent of the claim that I make. I can, of course, take on such theoretical commitments about the future as well. I may predict that it will snow tomorrow, or that the price of gas will go up over the summer, and my future actions will be expected to have no effect on the states of affairs that I'm making these claims about. However, with some claims about the future, my commitment is not so much theoretical as *practical*. When I tell my wife that I will pick up some milk on the way home, I take on a commitment to *make it the case* that I do so. One might make a more theoretical prediction about this as well, but facts that undermine the theoretical commitment need not absolve me of the practical one.<sup>31</sup> Statements that are exclusively about the past or present can't embody such practical commitments. The facts that the claims are about have always been settled, and so there is no way for us to affect them by the time that the claim is made.

<sup>27</sup>See Sorensen (2001), Horwich (1997, 2000). The main difference Ebbs and these others being that Ebbs explicitly argues that the failure of determination is also a feature of any future state of our practice, not just its current one (and so it applies to **PCFU** just as much as **PCU**). (See Ebbs 2009, 24–25 **HT**).

<sup>28</sup>On such a view, branches would only be apparent, and our current and past usage would always settle in advance which possible branch is actually the one that accords with what we currently mean. So, for instance, we may have changed what we meant by "gold" without realizing it.

<sup>29</sup>See, for instance (Fine 1975; Keefe 2000). The denial of **Determinacy** can also be found independently of any particular worries about vagueness in Wittgenstein (1953), and Lakoff and Johnson (1999).

<sup>30</sup>McGee and McLaughlin (1995, 1998) also try to hold on to all three, but do so by splitting our intuitive conception of truth. They see our idea of truth being governed by (1) a "Disquotational Principle" (that entails **Determinacy**) and a "Correspondence Principle", (the first half of which is something like **U**). They recognize the tension between these two, so they argue that our pre-theoretical conception of truth should be split into a notion of "definite truth" which is governed by the Correspondence Principle, and "truth" which simply follows the Disquotational Principle for a related approach, see Field (1994a, 1994b). This way they can keep all three, but only at the expense of denying that the meanings for which **Determinacy** holds are the same as those for which **U** is true. (McGee and McLaughlin's views are discussed in considerably more detail in Jackman 2006).

<sup>31</sup>Treating such practical commitments as merely theoretical amounts to a type of 'bad faith' of the sort discussed in Moran (2001).

Without a commitment to something like **PCFU**, **Determinacy** would need to be viewed as a purely theoretical commitment on our part. If future usage could not contribute to what we currently mean, then the claim that our terms have determinate extensions would be a claim about something that has already been settled, and thus completely out of our practical control. Of course, one could endorse **PCFU** and still view one's commitment to **Determinacy** as purely theoretical, in which case endorsing both **Determinacy** and **U** amounts to a *prediction* (rather than something closer to a *promise*) that our usage will eventually produce completely determinate meanings. The truth of **Branching** would entail that this prediction is false, so merely endorsing **PCFU** will not make **U** compatible with the combination of **Determinacy** and **Branching**.

That said, while endorsing **PCFU** isn't *sufficient* to change our commitment to **Determinacy** from a theoretical to a practical one, it is still *necessary* for the change, and once **Determinacy** is viewed in this more practical fashion, its potential compatibility with both **U** and **Branching** becomes clearer. For instance, one might think that our legal practice embodies a practical commitment to something like **Determinacy**. For every case considered, a particular law either does, or doesn't apply to it, and if it does apply, it should determine a definite outcome.<sup>32</sup> However, this commitment is implausible if viewed as a purely theoretical one about the past intensions of lawmakers.<sup>33</sup> There seems little reason to think that our legal practice has thus far, or will in any future time, produce a set of norms that are so fine grained that they would have a settled answer for *every possible* case. Viewed from a theoretical or 'external' perspective, then, the determinacy of law is an insupportable commitment. However, for those *inside* the legal practice, the commitment can be adopted as a practical one. For every case that comes up, there *must* be a decision, and this requires that past acts be evaluable in terms of current 'clarifications' of the norms involved.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>See Tanesini (2006, 200) on how determinate norms must be both "application determinate" and "verdict determinate".

<sup>33</sup>See Tanesini (2006, 192) on the relevance H.L.A. Hart's discussion of the limitations of original intentions when determining whether, say, electric wheelchairs should count as "vehicles" in the context of an ordinance vehicles in public parks (Hart 1961, 121–127)). For a more extended discussion of the application of this sort of view to legal norms, see (Collins 2006, 2011; Martí and Ramírez-Ludeña 2018).

<sup>34</sup>While I don't have space to discuss it at any length here (though see the introduction to this issue), this picture also suggests how inquiry can involve 'conceptual engineering' in a substantive sense. Accounts of conceptual engineering often seem caught in a dilemma: either the products of conceptual inquiry reveal concepts that have been there all along, in which case it is more a case of *discovery* than *engineering*, or entirely new concepts have been created, in which case conceptual engineering always involves changing the subject. By contrast, our commitment to **Branching** entails that the process of inquiry isn't just a matter of discovering meaning facts that have determinately been there all along,

In a similar fashion, if someone looks at our linguistic practice from an external perspective, **Determinacy** will seem implausible. If concept use really is open textured, then for any pre-branching point, meaning will be unsettled, so no matter how far into the future you go, you won't reach a point where usage has produced completely determinate meanings. If the practice's extension into the future is *finite*, then, there will inevitably come a point where the incompatibility of **Branching**, **U** and **Determinacy** will come to a head. By contrast, if the commitment to **Determinacy** is seen as practical, then its combination with **Branching** only commits us to (1) settling the branches that come to our attention, and then (2) accepting **Continuity**, i.e. reading those settlements back on to past claims, and accepting that future determinations can be read back on to ours (i.e. **Continuity** commits us to allowing future pre-specifications of our own claims). A commitment to **PCFU** allows for just this. From the external perspective, we may recognize that our practice may never produce completely determinate contents, but from the more internal perspective, the future is *open* to us, and we can understand ourselves as able to make our contents determinate for as long as the branches come.<sup>35</sup>

To take another related example, in chess there is a sense in which bishops *must* move along diagonal lines, and a sense in which they *clearly* do not. This is not merely because it is a contingent fact that chess has the rules it does,<sup>36</sup> but rather because it is a contingent fact that the physical objects called 'bishops' are moved in accordance with the rules of chess which govern them. (Indeed, when we aren't playing chess, they typically do not so move.) When one is playing within the game, one is committed to seeing to it that the bishops only move diagonally, and from this 'internal' perspective, they simply *must* move this way. Nevertheless, the game of chess can be viewed from a more 'external' perspective in which one can recognize that the piece that one is characterizing as a 'bishop' may not, in fact, always be moved in the way that the rules require (players may cheat, make mistakes, etc). In much the same way, there may be a sense in which **Determinacy** *must* hold of our words, and a sense in which it *clearly* does not. When one is engaged in the practice of making assertions, one is committed to seeing to it that those assertions have determinate content, and from this 'internal'

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while our commitment to **Continuity** entails that the production of increasingly determinate meanings don't amount to a case of conceptual change. On something like this approach, see (Ball 2020). Sawyer [this volume] expresses strong doubts about this approach to conceptual engineering, which may not be surprising, since she presupposes the denial of **Branching** for all of the relevant cases.

<sup>35</sup>See Jackman (2006, 238–240).

<sup>36</sup>See Vendler (1967).

perspective, **Determinacy** must be true. Nevertheless, our linguistic practice can be viewed from a more 'external' perspective in which one can recognize that the noises that one is characterizing as words, assertions, etc., need not have the sort of determinate content that speakers commit themselves to them having.

It was stressed in the preceding section that any plausible version of **PCFU** (indeed, any plausible version of **U**) must present a 'normative' relation between meaning and use that can underwrite a gap between how our terms *are* and *should be* used, but the issues branching/open-texture brings up point to *another* important sense in which the relation between use and meaning must be normative. The first sort of normativity requires that our meaningful utterances be the sort of things between which logical relations hold,<sup>37</sup> and the Frege/Williamson arguments stress that such logical relations can only be properly understood as holding between expressions with *determinate* content. It thus follows that, (1) if use is to produce *meaning* it needs to be governed by norms like **Determinacy**, and (2) the truth of **Branching** entails that **Determinacy** could never be accurate as a mere *description* of our practice. Rather, use could only be understood in terms of **Determinacy** if **Determinacy** were a 'regulative' norm *governing* our practice, and treating **Determinacy** this way requires that the usage so governed be extended into the future, otherwise it would be out of our control and thus not an appropriate target for such norms. Consequently, rather than undermining all versions of **U**, our commitment to **Branching** and **Determinacy** support our commitment to **PCFU**.<sup>38</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

It seems, then, that adopting **Continuity** should encourage one to adopt **PCFU** rather than reject the idea that meaning is grounded in use. Indeed, while many arguments against the grounding thesis draw from the intuition that meaning is 'normative', the temporally extended version of the grounding thesis embodied in **PCFU** may, in fact, be the only way in which we can ultimately make sense of essential aspects of the normativity or meaning.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>37</sup>Or at least that is so on the roughly Davidsonian metasemantics presupposed here.

<sup>38</sup>See Jackman (2004, 2006). For another argument motivating Temporal Externalism in terms of something like **Determinacy** see (Tanesini 2006, 200–201).

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