

LANGUAGE AND THE HAVING OF CONCEPTS

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§1 One method of handling the question of what it is to have a concept makes essential use of results common to a certain group of theories of meaning. This method¹ can be given the following stepwise representation. (1) Establish that there is a class of expressions each of which means, in at least one sense of 'means', something which can be called, according to preference in regard to vocabulary, either a universal, a property, or a concept. (2) Explain the fact that people understand statements containing expressions which mean universals, properties, or concepts by postulating a capacity for standing in a special relation of having which holds from minds to those entities meant by the class of expressions in question. (3) Identify the actualization of this capacity with what is ordinarily spoken of as the having of a concept. The 'has' in 'John has the concept *red*' is thus interpreted as referring to a relation of having of the kind which holds between minds and universals, properties, or concepts. And 'the concept *red*' in the context of this statement is interpreted as referring to the universal, property, or concept which is the meaning of the expression 'red'. If no obstacles are encountered in taking these steps, then there is an analysis of having a concept in terms of having a meaning.

We will devote the present section to the task of showing that such a meaning theory of conceptualization is unsatisfactory. We shall thereby be removing at least one important barrier in the way of a sympathetic hearing for the detailed discussion of the radically different approach to the question of what it is to have a concept in the subsequent sections of this paper.

In taking step (1) above two starting points are at least logically possible. We can begin (a) with a consideration of expressions in use or (b) with a consideration of expressions themselves apart from their use. Whether we take step (1) by beginning with (a) or by beginning with (b), we cannot subsequently take step (3) without incurring circularity. Our argument for this shall hinge on the claim that what is meant by saying that a certain expression means a universal, a property, or a concept is that it is of such a kind that a person who understands it is said to have the corresponding concept.

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