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Word and World

Practice and the Foundations of Language

This important book proposes a new account of the nature of language, founded on an original interpretation of Wittgenstein. The authors deny the existence of a direct referential relationship between words and things. Rather, the link between language and world is a two-stage one, in which words are related to practices, and only practices relate to the world. Arguing against the philosophical mainstream descending from Frege and Russell to Quine, Davidson, Dummett, McDowell, Evans, Putnam, Kripke, and others, the authors demonstrate that discarding the notion of reference does not entail relativism or semantic nihilism.

A provocative reexamination of the interrelations of language and social practice, this book will interest not only philosophers of language but also literary theorists, linguists, psycholinguists, students of communication, and all those concerned with the nature and acquisition of human linguistic capacities.

Patricia Hanna is Professor of Philosophy and Linguistics at the University of Utah.

Bernard Harrison is Emeritus E. E. Ericksen Professor of Philosophy at the University of Utah and Honorary Professor of Philosophy at the University of Sussex.

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For Dot and Dudley

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PATRICIA HANNA
University of Utah

BERNARD HARRISON
University of Utah
University of Sussex

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Preface

This book is the product of a transatlantic cross-fertilisation. The authors found themselves from 1991 onwards members of the same department, at the University of Utah, to which Harrison had moved from a British university (Sussex). At that time, Hanna was nourishing some doubts about various forms of meaning-scepticism, mainly in Quine and Kripke. Harrison had a number of projects on hand, one of which was an absurdly ambitious attempt to rethink the philosophy of language since Frege from the standpoint of an idiosyncratic reinterpretation of Wittgenstein. Some of the component parts of this enterprise, including a series of exegetical studies of middle-period Wittgenstein, had seen or were about to see print, but the project as a whole was, to put it bluntly, stalled, and had been stalled, except on its exegetical front, since the early 1980s. Conversation between us at first revealed some points of contact between our two projects. Then we began to see the possibility of certain large structural moves that would get Harrison's project moving again, in directions that would provide a framework for Hanna's ideas. At first we thought the work might yield a joint paper. Later we realised that it would have to be a series of papers. Finally we resigned ourselves to producing a joint book. By this time so many changes had occurred in each of our minds, stemming from objections or suggestions by the other, that we would have been at a loss to say which of us "owned" which parts of the project. So far as the actual writing of the book is concerned, responsibility for Parts I–III and the Epilogue has fallen mainly to Harrison, for Part IV mainly to Hanna. But much of the other lurks in the work of each. We have made no attempt to paper over the differences in style between the parts of the book produced by one or the other of us, preferring authenticity to smoothness of surface.

Some of the material in the book has been aired at various graduate seminars at Utah, at a series of seminars on Wittgenstein by Harrison at Brigham Young University, and by Hanna at a series of lectures in 2000 and 2001 at Universität Rostock. We are grateful to the many colleagues

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and students who, on these occasions, by formulating objections, or in other ways, have helped us to think it through. We owe a heavy debt of gratitude also to the many colleagues and friends who have undertaken the task of reading and criticising earlier drafts of the book, including James Anderson, Marianna DiPaolo, Randall Eggert, Gabriel Josipovici, Don Garrett, John Gibson, Donald Gustafson, Michael Krausz, Diego Marconi, Susan Miller, Anthony Palmer, Guy Robinson, Guy Stock and Samuel C. Wheeler III, not forgetting the anonymous Cambridge readers, and Dorothy Harrison, who proofread the entire manuscript. It goes without saying that, while many improvements must be credited to them, any errors that remain are entirely our own responsibility.

Patricia Hanna
Bernard Harrison

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