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ZIFF'S SEMANTIC ANALYSIS

PAUL Ziff's book,* *Semantic Analysis,* embodies a determined attempt to develop an adequate conceptual framework for talking about what words mean and related matters and, in the course of so doing, to indicate how questions about meaning are to be investigated and claims thereto adjudicated. Despite the recent flood of publications on "semantics," in the various acceptations of that term, every previous attempt to do this job has been subject to easy refutation by a few elementary examples. It is often said that the meaning of a word is what it refers to or, perhaps, the relation between the word and what it refers to, but there are obviously many meaningful words that do not *refer* to anything, e.g., 'run', 'to', 'lazy'. Another popular view is that the meaning of a linguistic expression has something to do with the response, or disposition to response, it calls out in a hearer; but no one of this persuasion has done anything significant by way of specifying what response is regularly called out by, say, 'grass', and still less by way of specifying how any such response is basic to the meaning of the word. It is no small achievement on Professor Ziff's part to have given us an account for the refutation of which such elementary devices do not suffice. Here at last is an account of linguistic meaning that one can take seriously as an account of linguistic meaning and not simply as a dim discernment, and overstatement, of one aspect of the subject. And the difficulties into which even this account becomes entangled show us better than anything else could how difficult the task really is.

I shall attempt to trace out the main lines of Ziff's theory. I shall have to omit many subtleties and refinements, but I trust that what follows will serve to give the reader a preliminary notion of what Ziff is up to, as well as provide a basis for certain critical comments.

The notion of a "regularity" looms large in Ziff's discussion. A regularity is simply a *de facto* constant, or near-constant, conjunction. The regularities that are of interest here are those at

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* Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1960.

least one conjunct of which is the occurrence of a linguistic element of some sort. Ziff's first major assumption is that "meaning is essentially a matter of nonsyntactic semantic regularity" (42). Semantic regularities are those involving both linguistic elements and other things, e.g., persons, situations, or nonlinguistic events (27). The qualifier 'nonsyntactic' is needed, for Ziff recognizes that syntactic regularities, i.e., those involving only linguistic elements, also have a bearing on the meaning of a given expression and hence are properly called 'semantic regularities' also. (The fact that 'meadow' is a noun is of some relevance in determining the meaning of the word.) Although he does not explicitly say so, I suspect that the main reason Ziff has made regularities central is that "In formulating the theory presented here I have had but one objective in mind, viz., that of determining a method and a means of evaluating and choosing between competing analyses of words and utterances" (196). If we can analyze the notion of meaning in terms of regularities, it would seem that we shall have shown the possibility of an empirical test of statements about what words mean. For the existence or nonexistence of syntactic and semantic regularities could in principle be ascertained by patient and careful observation of linguistic activities and the situations in which they take place. A little further on, I shall voice some doubts about this program and indeed, about the extent to which Ziff himself takes it seriously.

Although Ziff is ultimately interested in the meaning of subsentential units of the order of words, he begins his search for regularities by considering not words but rather the "whole utterance," "a stretch of a person's talk bounded by silence at both ends" (10); this is, roughly, the spoken equivalent of a sentence. I believe that Ziff is well advised to choose this starting point, but he has failed to give what I take to be the decisive reason for proceeding in this order, viz., that if one tries to find regularities connected with a particular word, one will find nothing interesting. A mere glance at the various linguistic contexts in which a word like 'shirt' functions—e.g., 'Bring me my shirt', 'I wish I had a shirt', 'Shirts were unknown in ancient Rome', 'Shirts fascinate me'— should be sufficient to convince us that nothing of semantic interest will be correlated with all such utterances.

Ziff has obviously read widely and deeply in contemporary linguistic theory; he makes extensive use of concepts and methods developed by linguists. It is, therefore, not surprising that it is among linguists that one finds most of the previous attempts to construe the meaning of an expression in terms of regular correlations between the utterance of the expression and features of the

situation in which the utterance occurs. Thus L. Bloomfield (*Language,* p. 139) defines the "meaning of a linguistic form" as "the situation in which the speaker utters it and the response which it calls forth in the hearer." But Ziff is a long way from falling into the naivetes of these predecessors. In addition to choosing a more favorable initial unit than the word, he is well aware that to try to work with unexceptionable correlations is hopeless. "The claim that a certain syntactic or semantic regularity is to be found in or in connection with E and not merely in or in connection with some proper part of E can generally be defeated by uttering an utterance that deviates from this regularity" (24). And mistakes, carelessness, ignorance, and deceit provide us with enough exceptions to any interesting generalization to make such strategems as this unnecessary. Thus semantically interesting regularities all have the form, "If u (an utterance) is uttered, then generally such-and-such" (46). (Incidentally, given this position, it is difficult to understand Ziff's putting semantic regularities in the class of "type regularities," which are then contrasted with "statistical regularities" (26). Statistical regularities are characterized as those "pertaining to the frequency of the occurrence of tokens" (26). But this is a strange restriction on the use of 'statistical'. Why does not the term 'statistical' apply to statements to the effect that *generally* when u is uttered, such-and-such conditions hold?)

But not all such regularities have bearing on meaning. In the course of considering various unacceptable candidates, Ziff enunciates certain principles in terms of which they can be excluded: (1) The Principle of Conventionality: "a necessary but not a sufficient condition of a regularity being semantically relevant in the analysis of a corpus is that the speakers of the language associated with the corpus can deviate from the regularity at will" (57). This rules out our regular emotional reactions which have psychopathological but not semantic interest, e.g., the fact that whenever a certain woman utters the word 'date' she experiences emotional discomfort. It also rules out any regularity that holds without exception for all utterances of the language indifferently, assuming that the lack of deviation is not just an accident. (2) The Principle of Composition: "Roughly speaking, it is a principle to the effect that the relevant similarity between distinct semantic correlates of u_i and u_j be a reflection of the relevant similarity between the two utterances" (62). The plausibility of this principle can be seen from the following considerations. One of the most important facts about a language is that speakers of the language can immediately understand sentences they have not previously encountered

and the meaning of which they have, therefore, not learned. Presumably this is possible because the structure of the new sentence (including the elements in that structure) give a clue to its meaning; and this would seem to require that the meaning or the facts be correlated with another (previously understood) sentence in a way structurally similar to that in which the two sentences are related to each other. And this is what Ziff's principle requires.

It seems that the use of this principle will entangle us in a lot of sticky problems concerning the structure of facts, isomorphism between facts and propositions, etc. Ziff attempts to sidestep all this by the following bit of footwork. Instead of speaking of the regular correlation of u with the state of affairs s, he speaks of pairing u with w, where w is the sentence one would use to assert that such a state of affairs holds (47 ff.). Then all the talk of structural similarity and dissimilarity will range over linguistic elements exclusively. It may seem that this move only succeeds in concealing the problem. For now whether the Principle of Composition is satisfied in a given case will depend on the sentence that we choose for reporting in the meta-language that a certain state of affairs holds. Let the sentences be 'Your son is at the door' and 'Your daughter is at the door'. If we pair the first with 'A male offspring of the hearer is in front of a door which is singled out by something in the context', and the second with 'A female offspring of the hearer is in front of a door which is singled out by something in the context', then the principle is satisfied. But if we leave the first pairing as it is, while changing the second conjunct of the second pairing to 'The relation of being in front of holds between a female offspring of the hearer and a door which is singled out by something in the context', then the principle is violated. And yet I suppose that the two pairings are equally plausible, and equally plausible because they are simply different ways of expressing the same correlation. But I do not believe that Ziff is in serious trouble here. He could simply say that the two different pairings I cited are different pairings and that one of them is in conformity with the principle and one is not. The question would then be whether Ziff could find a pairing approved by this principle for every correlation that one would want to accept as semantically important. One cannot speak with much assurance on this point until the project is more fully worked out, but it seems plausible to suppose that it is possible.

We can now see some of the uses Ziff makes of the Principle of Composition. For one thing, there are semantic regularities like the following. "If 'The cat is on the mat.' is uttered then generally a philosophicogrammatical discussion is under way" (60).

Such a regularity conforms to the Principle of Conventionality. One can, at will, utter 'The cat is on the mat.' when not engaging in a philosophicogrammatical discussion. But it seems clear, intuitively, that this regularity can have nothing to do with what is ordinarily being said when one utters this sentence, and still less with what the words 'cat' and 'mat' mean. This regularity is ruled out by the Principle of Composition as follows:

Thus if 'a philosophicogrammatical discussion is under way' is paired with 'The cat is on the mat.' whereas 'some canine is on some mat' is paired with 'The dog is on the mat.', what structural similarity there is between 'a philosophicogrammatical discussion is under way' and 'some canine is on some mat' can hardly be construed as a reflection of the structural similarity between 'The cat is on the mat.' and 'The dog is on the mat.' (61).

In addition, Ziff attempts to use the Principle of Composition to find an appropriate coupling for the 'The cat is on the mat.'. The passage just quoted continues:

Consequently it may be (and in this case is) simpler to construe 'The cat is on the mat.' as having paired with it 'some feline is on some mat'.

A pairing of this sort Ziff calls a "projection." The program suggested by this example can be stated as follows. If we simply made a semantic analysis of utterances by considering the nonlinguistic states of affairs that are in fact regularly correlated with a given utterance, the resulting system would violate the Principle of Composition at many points. This can be remedied by taking some pairings as basic, e.g., 'The dog is on the mat.' with 'some canine is on some mat', and then rewriting others, where necessary, to make them fit with the former in accordance with the Principle of Composition. (Over the whole language a great many sentences will have to be taken as "primary.") Those pairings made solely on this latter basis are not themselves reports of *de facto* regularities; they are theoretical constructs. They are, speaking informally, statements of regularities that would obtain if the language were spoken in such a way that for each sentence primary uses—reporting a certain fact, making a certain request, expressing a certain feeling, etc., as the case may be—greatly predominated over derivative uses like giving examples or reciting poems, and deviations like lying, gross mistakes of fact, and misuses of words occurred in a negligible proportion of cases. (The formula for a projection is 'If *u* is uttered, then in a standard case, such-and-such' (46). Of course, what will count as a *standard* case for any utterance will depend on the projection chosen.)

Projections are invoked not only for sentences that normally occur in rather bizarre circumstances but also for "determinate utterances."

By a 'determinate utterance' I mean an utterance that can be employed in making an assertion, or statement, etc., and such that if it is employed in making a statement precisely what statement is made is not dependent on the context in which the utterance is uttered (126).

A determinate utterance is thus contrasted with those in which terms like 'this', 'here', 'I', etc., which depend on the context of utterance to fill out their significance, are employed. ''It is an important fact that no significant state regularities can be found in connection with determinate utterances'' (126). In support of this claim Ziff considers the two sentences: (1) George K. crossed the Hudson at 2 A.M. on October 20, 1943' and (2) George K. crossed the Missouri at 3 A.M. on October 30, 1945', assuming (1) to be true and (2) to be false. There are two reasons why we cannot get what we need with regularities. In the case of (2) it is obvious that we can find no condition that will do the trick, since by hypothesis the state of affairs that has the desired connection with what is being said is not available. But (1) is in no better case. It won't do to say that when (1) is uttered, then generally it is true that George K. crossed the Hudson at 2 A.M. on October 20, 1943. This state of affairs is not something which generally holds when the utterance is uttered. It simply holds once-for-all. There is nothing here which might or might not be satisfied each time the utterance is uttered, but which in fact is satisfied in most such cases. (Ziff puts this by saying that the Principle of Conventionality is violated. The speaker has no option of violating the ''regularity.'') And such a pairing as is possible here can equally be made between (1) and every other true statement whatsoever, e.g., 'Japan is across the Pacific from California'. By introducing projections in such cases we can pair (1) with 'Someone named George K. crossed the Hudson at 2 A.M. on October 20, 1943'.

Cornering Ziff's procedure here there are certain problems. Going back to the first case, there is no reason given for assigning a preferred status to 'The dog is on the mat.' rather than to 'The cat is on the mat.'. That is, it is clear that 'a philosophicogrammatical discussion is under way' fails to relate to 'some canine is on some mat' in a way that reflects the structural similarity between 'The cat is on the mat.' and 'The dog is on the mat.'. But why not require that 'some canine is on some mat' be revamped to relate to 'a philosophicogrammatical discussion is under way' with the required degree of structural similarity rather than vice versa? The answer presumably lies partly in our intuitive sense of what the significance of the utterance is, partly in a consideration of the other utterances that have to be fitted into the total scheme. The presumption is that there are many utterances of the form 'The A is

on the B.' that are in fact regularly correlated with states of affairs like 'some canine is on some mat', whereas 'The cat is on the mat.' is an isolated case. I think it plausible to suppose that an attempt to work out a complete system of pairings along these lines would lead us in directions that are intuitively satisfactory, but the question bears discussion. A more serious difficulty is this. Granted that we have to pair 'The cat is on the mat.' with some sentence of the form 'some A is on some B', why 'some *feline* is on some mat', rather than, e.g., 'some rabbit is on some mat'? How do we justify the choice of the particular lexical item 'feline'? We might appeal to another class of variants in which 'cat' appears in different syntactical environments, e.g., 'That is my cat.', 'The cat is at the door.', and note that straightforward regularities justify pairings with sentences containing 'feline'. But this is relevant, on grounds of the Principle of Composition, only if it does something to show that the structural similarity of 'some feline is on some mat' and 'some canine is on some mat' is more like the structural similarity of 'The cat is on the mat.' and 'The dog is on the mat.' than is the structural similarity of 'some rabbit is on some mat' and 'some canine is on some mat'. I do not know what plausible definition would yield this result. One might include the distributional characteristics of the morphemic constituents as an aspect of the structure; but 'feline' and 'rabbit' presumably have about the same distribution. This is one of the points at which the concept of structural similarity is, as Ziff admits (62), badly in need of further discussion.

A third problem concerns the "projections" made for determinate utterances. The notion of a projection was introduced via the notion of a standard case. But what does it mean to say of a determinate utterance *u*, "If *u* is uttered in a standard case, then such-and-such"? Since the such-and-such either holds once for all or not at all, the basis for distinguishing standard cases from others has disappeared. This means that no sense has been given to 'projection' as applied to determinate utterances.

With respect to the problem of finding semantic regularities, Ziff makes an interesting suggestion:

This indicates that the problem of finding tentative semantic regularities pertaining to utterances of E can be dealt with in two stages. First, it is necessary to find connections between the act of uttering u_i and the performance of certain other speech acts. Secondly, it is then necessary to discover the conditions under which the speech acts connected with u_i in the first stage of analysis can be performed (77).

But Ziff rarely makes use of this technique when he is engaged in specifying semantic regularities. And on the rare occasions when he does use it, it leads him astray.

An utterance like 'Shut the door' is connected with an imperative-speech act. If such an utterance is uttered then generally a certain state of affairs obtains in our limited world, viz., one characterizable in terms of the satisfaction of the conditions requisite for the performance of the imperative-act in question. Thus there will be an open door; the hearer will be in a position to and will be capable of shutting the door in question, and so forth (139).

But although it is no doubt true that if 'Shut the door' is uttered it is generally the case that there is some open door which is singled out by something in the context, nevertheless that there be such an open door is not a necessary condition for the performance of the order or request. For example, I might approach you in the kitchen and ask you to go shut the front door just in order to get you out of the way, even though the front door was already shut. When you discovered the deception you would not deny that I had asked you to shut the front door. Quite the contrary. You would accuse me of asking you to shut the front door when I knew perfectly well it was open. What you would not say is: "You didn't really ask me to shut the front door." The set of conditions that generally hold when an utterance is uttered is not in general identical with the set of conditions that must be satisfied if the speech act primarily performed by the utterance of that utterance is to be performed. What 'The dog is on the mat.' is uttered, then generally some uniquely determined canine is on some uniquely determined mat, but I can certainly tell someone (mistakenly or deceitfully) that the dog is on the mat even though this condition does not hold. Ziff tries to avoid this difficulty by distinguishing the act of making an assertion and the act of making a true assertion (116–117). But this does not ring true. Surely in any sense of 'speech act' in which it is crucial to meaning, one is performing the same speech act when one says truly that the door is open and when one says falsely that the door is open. For in both cases *what* one says is the same.

Now let us suppose that we have made satisfactory pairings for all the whole utterances of the language, either by way of regularities or by way of projections. We still have not said anything about the meaning of words; and if Ziff is right in supposing that one does not speak, without oddity, of the meaning of sentences, we have not said anything about meaning at all. Assuming that we have found semantically relevant pairings for a large number of utterances in which a word w appears, we must isolate some common contribution that w is making to each of these sets of correlated conditions before we are in a position to specify the meaning of w. Ziff recognizes that we cannot do this simply by extracting a common element from all these sets and linking that with w.

It is clear that ['That is a tiger.'] [1] is not only not identical with ['I want a tiger.'] but the two sets do not seem even to resemble one another. And although the intersection (i.e., the logical product) of the two sets may not be null it is not at all obvious that it is not null. In the one case one can expect to find a tiger or something resembling a tiger but in the other case one can only expect to find a person wanting a tiger. So there is a problem here (155).

The alternative Ziff offers is rather complicated, and I shall try to state it in a form which, though simpler, will preserve the essentials. Consider a large set of pairs of utterances, each consisting of (1) an utterance containing 'tiger', (2) an utterance differing from (1) only in the substitution of some other word for 'tiger'. And now consider the sets of conditions paired with each member of each pair; and more particularly consider those conditions which belong to the first member of a given pair and not also to the second. Each such set can be called the "semantically relevant difference" with respect to the meaning of 'tiger' in that particular context. Now suppose that in many such pairs the relevant difference turns out to be the same. What 'tiger' means is somehow to be specified in terms of this common difference. It is essential to mention at least one further complexity. Ziff builds in elaborate safeguards to prevent differences depending on the phonetic or orthographic form of the word from being counted, e.g., the difference between the conditions associated with ' "Cinema" has six letters' and ' "Movie" has five letters'. He also rules out differences resulting from syntactic structure rather than the particular morphemes, e.g., the difference (or part of the difference) between 'Where is the orange flower?' and 'Where is the orange grower?'.

In this account Ziff has undoubtedly made a praiseworthy effort to solve a very tough problem. He is far ahead of most writers on meaning in recognizing that there is indeed a real problem here. It is not generally recognized that there does not exist a satisfactory terminology for talking about meaning. We can, of course, give definitions, and say, e.g., that 'auspicious' means favorable. But a very little reflection should be enough to convince us that what we are doing when we say something like that is simply to provide another expression which, we are claiming, is equivalent to the one whose meaning we were giving. And that of course raises the question: equivalent in what respect? There must be something about the role each of these expressions has in linguistic activity that makes them equivalent in such a way that one can properly exhibit the second in saying what the first means. Ziff has made a serious attempt to give us a way of characterizing that role. But,

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[1] The brackets around the sentence are supposed to indicate the set of semantically relevant conditions associated with the sentence.

although his attempt goes far beyond anything else in the field, it does not quite work. The main trouble is that the notion of a difference in sets of conditions will not do the job, at least not without further development. Ziff construes the difference as itself a set of conditions (155); and indeed he must, if the meaning of the word is to be stated in terms of something empirically identifiable in linguistic behavior. But it seems that we can find no such set of conditions that will do the job, even in the (presumably most favorable) cases he gives in illustration, e.g., 'tiger'. Here is the only passage in which Ziff actually tries to formulate a part of a semantically relevant difference:

> And so one can say that a relevant difference between 'That is a tiger.' and 'That is a lion.' is that the set of conditions associated with the former utterance, but not the set associated with the latter utterance, includes the condition of being striped. Furthermore, that is also a relevant difference between the set of conditions associated with 'I want a tiger.' and the set associated with 'I want a lion.'. A relevant difference between wanting a tiger and wanting a lion is that in the former case one is wanting something striped (189).

But no common condition has been indicated in the two sets of differences. In the first case part of the semantically relevant difference will be the condition that something singled out contextually as the object of reference be striped. But there is no such component of the semantically relevant difference in the second case. The nearest we come to it is the condition that the speaker wants something striped. And that is definitely not the same condition. Ziff can make it appear that there is a common element only by speaking of "the condition of being striped." But that is not a complete condition. One wants to know—of *what* being striped? If you ask me under what condition I will go to the park, and I reply, "The condition of being striped," you will justifiably be unable to make any sense out of my reply until I specify further and say—on condition of so-and-so being striped. Furthermore, in the second case, there is no condition that anything be striped, but only that the speaker want something striped. Interestingly enough, Ziff's proposal fails for just the same reason as the move be rejected, viz., trying directly to find something in common in the conditions for 'That is a tiger.' and 'I want a tiger.'.

Next I should like to make some critical comments on the *sort* of theory Ziff is proposing. As we have seen, Ziff wants to rest semantic analysis on *de facto* correlations between utterances and other events or states of affairs. But he recognizes that only regularities that have exceptions are going to be of any semantic interest. This means he is faced with the problem of distinguishing between the regularity and the exceptions; for what will count as

an exception depends on how one formulates the regularity. Thus suppose we follow Ziff in considering the following to be a semantic regularity: "Utterances of the type 'Pass the salt.' have been uttered almost always when there was salt present." Then all the following cases will count as deviations:

1. One utters the sentence in the course of reciting a poem or telling a story.

2. One utters the sentence in jest, perhaps ribbing someone who is continually asking for salt.

3. One is asking for salt under the mistaken supposition that there is salt present.

4. One asks one's companion for salt in order to divert his attention momentarily, even though one knows that there is no salt present.

5. Because of inadequate mastery of the language, one utters the sentence, intending to ask for the sugar. (There is sugar present, but no salt.)

There are important distinctions among these various cases which are blurred by lumping them all under the heading of "deviations." First, it is clear that something goes wrong in 3 to 5, but not in 1 and 2,[2] which are as much in order, as little subject to censure, as the most conventional dinner-time request for salt. I should say that 1 and 2 constitute genuine and distinct speech-acts, which can be performed by the utterance of the sentence in question, and that separate sets of regularities should be formulated for each of these uses. No doubt there is an important sense in which these uses of the sentence are derivative from the more primary use of asking for salt, but that does not give them the status of deviations. Moreover, there are other cases in which the same sentence will have several equally primary uses; e.g., 'Can you reach the salt?' may be used either to request a certain piece of information or to ask someone to pass the salt. And in these cases one would have to formulate separate sets of regularities for the two uses. The fact that there are alternative uses for a given sentence shows that semantic regularities must be formulated in a more complicated way than Ziff supposes. We must complicate the statement at least to the extent of saying: when u is uttered to perform speech act s, then generally such-and-such. And this would suggest that the speech-act, rather than the utterance, is the most profitable basic unit of analysis.

To return to the list of deviations, I think that 2 to 5 can all be properly called deviations, but what goes wrong differs widely from case to case; and these differences will often become important. For example when the deviation is due to a mistake of fact or an

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[2] Ziff admits this (58), but he fails to build the relevant distinctions into his scheme.

intent to deceive, we do not have a failure in the employment of language or in the use of words, as we do where the deviation is directly attributable to ignorance of the language or carelessness in its employment.

Incidentally, given the extent to which Ziff's formulations reflect the idiom of contemporary linguistics, it is surprising that he has not distinguished utterances more finely. For example:

> . . . it is perfectly obvious that deviations from regularities occur in everyday discourse. If one is asked what one thinks of Professor Dimwit one may reply 'Oh he's a bright fellow, yes, very bright.' making it perfectly clear that one thinks the man is a fool. Irony is one form of deviation from a semantic regularity . . . (73).

For the linguist the ironical utterance 'He's a bright fellow' is clearly distinguished, by phonemes of contour, from the straight-forward expression of opinion, 'He's a bright fellow'. We do not have the same utterance on the two occasions, and so there can be no question of one's being a deviation from regularities found in connection with the other.

At the very least, I should suppose that the last few paragraphs show that there are problems concerning the selection of regularities that need further discussion. It is not a matter of just looking to see what is usually there.

Moreover, I think there is reason to doubt that regularities have the importance Ziff assigns them, and even that they have such an importance in Ziff's own practice. Of course Ziff does not claim actually to proceed in semantic analysis solely, or even primarily, by looking for regularities. He avowedly gets his hypotheses, or hunches, from ''intuitions,'' particularly from the sense that a given utterance, or a given utterance under certain conditions, sounds odd. But, according to the official line, these intuitions merely have the status of suggestions. The proof comes from actually discovering the regularities from which the odd-sounding utterances are deviant. By couching meaning-statements in terms of empirically discoverable regularities we take them out of the realm of subjective impressions and render them subject to inter-subjective verification. But if we look at Ziff's actual procedures, both in his fragmentary—and illuminating—discussions of certain words like 'should' and 'ought' (191–193) and in his full-dress discussion of 'good' in the final chapter, we never get to the decisive test. What Ziff actually does in the chapter on 'good' is to collect a large number of utterances containing 'good' that sounds all right and a large number that sound odd and then offer a hypothesis about the meaning which will illuminate those differences. But then no evidence is adduced to show that there are regularities, in

the actual practice of English speakers, that would justify this analysis. What is more surprising is that no attempt is made to give the analysis a canonical formulation in terms of semantically relevant differences, so that a test by reference to regularities would be possible. Of course one might regard the chapter as a preliminary to such formulation, but there is no explicit indication that it is to be so regarded. And even if it were, it is very strange that the one extended investigation of the meaning of a word should be carried on in such independence of the theory.

Moreover, the concrete, and valuable, suggestions Ziff gives for getting at the meaning of a word, some of which he does follow in the discussion of 'good', fail to reflect the theory. Consider ''paradigmatization.''

> Imagine that your life and fortune depended on showing a bloody and irascible dictator of an animal that was unmistakably a tiger. . . . In such a case, would you prefer to show him an x such that x is striped or not striped? four-legged or three-legged? whiskered or unwhiskered? purple or black or neither? one inch high or two feet high? tangible or intangible? and so on. In this way one can easily formulate a dictionary entry such as 'tiger': a large carnivorous quadrupedal feline, tawny yellow in color with blackish transverse stripes, etc. (194–195).

No bridge is built between this technique and the notion that the meaning of a word is a function of the semantically relevant differences between appropriately chosen sets of conditions.

If I may throw out a suggestion which requires for its development much more space than I have here, the notion of rules, which Ziff rather cavalierly dismisses in the Appendix to Chapter I (on the basis of a needlessly restrictive conception of a rule), fits his practice much better than the official formulation in terms of regularities. In his investigation of 'good', he proceeds by reflecting on the difference between two groups of utterances; one contains such items as 'That is a good ache.', 'That is a good corpse.', 'That is a good molecule.'; the other contains such items as 'That is a good feeling.', 'That is a good cadaver.', and 'That is a good pattern.'. He then attempts to find what it is that makes the members of the second group O.K. and the members of the first group odd. I should say that what Ziff is actually doing is trying to formulate the norms, or rules, that are violated by members of the first group but conformed to by members of the second. Since in fact he makes his procedure rest on a distinction between what conforms to some norm and what does not, it is natural to state his results in terms of rules, but, in the absence of a revamping of the procedure, unnatural to state it in terms of regularities.

Interspersed with the development of the semantic theory we

find a number of discussions of points currently of interest to philosophers, e.g., the verifiability criterion of meaningfulness, the concepts of truth and falsity, ontological commitments, proper names, synonymity, and ambiguity. Ziff has many wise and witty things to say on these topics, and one can be grateful for the illumination he often provides. My only complaint (a minor one) is that these digressions, some of them quite long, sometimes have the effect of not only interrupting, but even confusing the main line of the exposition. Often the space devoted to a topic reflects not its relevance to Ziff's theory but its prominence in recent philosophical discussions. Thus, after correctly pointing out that "Referring is only one among many speech acts" (83) and that ". . . a semantic analysis of E simply in terms of the conditions requisite for the performance of the speech acts of referring and of making a reference is equally hopeless. Few morphological elements of E refer to anything" (113), Ziff devotes 36 pages to referring and referring expressions and practically none to any of the many other speech acts. And most of these 36 pages he devotes to proper names, after he has said, "Proper names are an important topic in the philosophy of language but only because their importance has been exaggerated by both philosophers and grammarians" (85). No doubt it is important to correct the many misconceptions current among philosophers on these topics; but one wishes Ziff had acted on the convictions just cited to the extent of setting this discussion in the context of a more general treatment of speech acts of varying types.

The reader of this book will quickly come to realize that Ziff belongs to the you-may-think-that-*x*-and-*y*-are-undistinguishable-but-actually-there-are-very-profound-differences-between-them-which-have-unfortunately-been-overlooked-by-all-previous-thinkers school of thought. He obviously takes keen delight in pointing out commonly neglected differences in use, e.g., between 'meaningless', 'senseless', 'nonsensical' (150), 'false', 'untrue', 'not true' (117), 'interests', 'wishes', 'hopes' (219), 'referring' and 'making a reference' (84). Some of these he seems to have indulged in simply as displays of virtuosity, but some have a real bearing on the main problems of the book. This is particularly the case with respect to various distinctions he draws between semantic terms. In the preface he says:

. . . the question I begin with is 'What does the word 'good' mean?': to ask this question is not the same as asking 'What is the meaning of the word 'good'?' . . . Again, the question 'What meaning does the word 'good' have in English?' or what is different, 'What meaning does the word 'good' have?' is not the question that I raised. And of course I did not raise such questions

as 'What is the sense of the word 'good'?', 'What is the significance of the word 'good'?', 'Is the word 'good' meaningful?' (viii).

This may strike the reader as a splitting of imaginary hairs. I suppose it is quite clear that the last two sentences are different from each other and from any of the others. But when it comes to distinguishing 'What does the word 'good' mean?' from 'What is the meaning of the word 'good'?', one may well wonder. These dark sayings are only partially illuminated by what follows. In Chapter V, pp. 182–186, Ziff draws an interesting distinction between 'M has meaning in E', (with its correlated question, 'What meaning does M have in E?'), and 'M has a meaning (or meanings) in E' or 'M means ——' (with their correlated question, 'What does M mean?'). The claim is that the former locutions are appropriate whenever M has the same semantically relevant difference associated with it in a number of different contexts, but that the latter locutions are appropriate only where one can derive from this difference a tight set of necessary and sufficient conditions for the application of the term. The suggestion is made that, with respect to 'tiger' (and presumably for all, or many, physical-object common nouns), one can depict an ideal case, but one cannot specify any set of conditions that are strictly both sufficient and necessary for something being a tiger. So that although 'tiger' has meaning in English, it does not have *a* meaning, and it would be inappropriate to ask what it means. (The proper question is: 'What is a tiger?'.) [3]

This example nicely illustrates the values of this sort of fine distinction drawing and also the blind alleys into which it can lead us. By reflecting on conditions under which he would be prepared to say the one thing or the other, Ziff has hit upon an important distinction between words that are subject to sets of conditions which are more or less tight. I am not at all sure that the expressions 'have meaning' and 'have a meaning' are in fact commonly used in such a way as to mark that contrast; indeed I suspect that 'has meaning in E' is really a technical term introduced by Ziff and that it is not ordinarily employed in anything like the way he employs it. But it would be fruitless to debate *these* issues. Once the distinction just mentioned has been made explicit, issues as to how the one or the other expression is in fact used become pointless, except as they can serve to uncover further important distinctions. Reflection on the ways various expressions are commonly used is useful

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[3] Ziff also draws some careful distinctions between '*x* and *y* differ in meaning', '*x* and *y* differ in sense', '*x* has a different meaning from *y*', and '*x* has a different sense from *y*' (176–181), but I do not have the time to consider them.

for helping us to see distinctions we might otherwise not notice, but if we allow ourselves to become preoccupied with the facts of usage for their own sake, we shall have become entangled in morasses which are of no interest for philosophy and for which the techniques of philosophy are inadequate.

This book will undoubtedly have a high negative valence for many prospective readers. For one thing, it combines an extensive use of the conceptual tools and procedures of linguistics, which will initially seem strange and pointless to many philosophers, with a considerable preoccupation with currently fashionable problems of philosophers, which will seem perverse and trivial to many linguists. For another thing, the quasi-Wittgensteinian division into numbered paragraphs, combined with an only partially inhibited tendency to cryptic, since overcompressed, pronouncements, produces a pontifical air which will be distasteful to many.[4] It is to be hoped that readers so affected will persist in the face of their initial revulsion. If they do so they will be richly rewarded. For over and above pungent and pertinent comments on a wide variety of topics, most of which I have not had time to discuss,[5] the book presents a program for semantic analysis which will have to be taken seriously by every subsequent treatment of the subject. Future progress in semantics may go through Ziff's book, or it may recoil from it in another direction. But to ignore it will be impossible.

<div align="right">WILLIAM P. ALSTON</div>

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

[4] This is manifested, e.g., in the way Ziff sometimes sticks his neck out in tactically unprofitable ways. In the Preface he writes

> It seems that nowadays hardly anyone pays any attention to what a man says, only to what one thinks he means. But virtually no such exegesis, virtually no such interpretation, virtually no such construal, is called for here. If I say what is stupid, do not say "What he must have meant is such-and-such": I almost certainly meant what I said and if it was stupid then I was being stupid at the time whether I meant what I said or not (vii–viii).

After the author had struck this proud attitude, one has an almost irresistible tendency to catch him up on the very first page of Chapter I, when he says that his question 'What does the word 'good' mean?', "could not have been asked before 400 A.D., perhaps the birth century of the English language" (1). However, I cannot find it in my heart to follow our author's bravely defiant instructions. I feel sure that he really knows that 400 A.D. is not a century but only one year, and therefore I shall persist in according him the same consideration I do other merely human authors, and trying to puzzle out what he really means.

[5] In particular I regret not being able to consider the substance of Ziff's very interesting analysis of 'good' in the last chapter.