The assumption of such identities may hinder that of others. For instance it is conceivable that one meaning of a preposition might be identical with one meaning of a verbal aspect, when all the differences automatically consequent on the other units in the combinations concerned were accounted for. The same semantic units may occur, like the same phonemes, in a great variety of morphological categories. If we begin be attributing to each category its own single and unique rôle, the way to the discovery of such identities is effectively closed.

This is the error of paradigmatic atomism. It is usually accompanied by the error of syntagmatic atomism, the assumption that the meaning of a syntagm (after all contextual accidents have been deducted) is necessarily accounted for completely by the meanings of the individual morphemes and of their sequence. It is forgotten that the method of commutation, which serves to demonstrate a relevant distinction of meaning, cannot serve to localise this distinction at one point of the chain.

That the chain cannot be split up into a series of discrete units follows from a form of cumul seldom or never mentioned under that heading. Cumul is understood to consist of indivisible significants answering to divisible signifiés. This presents no difficulty. But the position is usually more complex : we have rather a morpheme A in which the semantic units a1, a2 etc, may be localised, a morpheme B with units b1, b2 etc., in a syntagm AB yielding also the units c, d, e which cannot be localised in either A or B independently, nor yet in the pattern of their combination, but is spread in indeterminable proportions over each. We may succeed in reducing these units by putting the burden on the linguistic context, but the fact of a morpheme-division does nothing to assure that this reduction is possible.

In brief, neither syntagmatic nor paradigmatic divisions in morphology are a guarantee of semantic division. All arguments to the contrary move in a circle.

(3) Semantics and Syntax.

In the older linguistics syntax and semantics tended to be confused. In the newer linguistics they tend to be contrasted. Neither tendency is justified. We deal only with the latter.

In a much simplified form, the view may be stated as follows : "Two definitions of the adjective are conceivable. The one is syntactic; the adjective is defined by its normally presupposing a substantive in the same syntagm, by its subordination to the substantive etc. Substantive and subordination are also defined syntactically (e.g. subordination is proved by the inability of a unit to enter the same combinations as the syntagm of which it is part). The other definition would be semantic : the adjective normally expresses an epithet, But this criterion is either secondary, or quite irrelevant".

Such a statement is acceptable. The adjective cannot be defined semantically, for the simple reason that it is not a semantic unit. It can be defined syntactically since all units (including the phonemes) can be defined syntactically. And since it belongs to no single liguistic plane, but to the Janus-faced class of signs, it can not be defined on any of these planes, but only in terms of syntax, as applicable to all planes.

But the notion of a contrast between syntactic and semantic definitions is quite false; since there are also semantic units, and these are capable of a double definition, one syntactic and the other semantic; just as the phonemes are capable of a double definition, without anybody having spoken of a contrast between phonemics and syntax. (For