

## PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE AND THE LAW IN H.L.A. HART'S LEGAL PHILOSOPHY

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*H.L.A. Hart, in his famous work, **The Concept of Law**, which is considered one of the most influential texts of analytical jurisprudence, emphasizes that many central problems in legal philosophy depend on an adequate understanding of language. He argues that the philosophy of language is foundational to the philosophy of law. Influenced by J.L. Austin and Ludwig Wittgenstein, Hart asserts that understanding the ordinary use of words in specific contexts is crucial for interpreting laws. It is undeniably true that lawmakers, judges, legal philosophers, and jurists frequently turn to disciplines focused on the meaning and interpretation of words. This paper examines Hart's perspective on the role of the philosophy of language in jurisprudence and explores how he addresses issues of legal interpretation through this framework. It argues that the philosophy of language is essential to determining the scope of reasonable interpretation. A well-developed philosophical understanding of meaning and usage greatly benefits legal philosophy. Accordingly, this paper highlights its critical role in understanding the nature of law.*

Keywords: H.L.A. Hart, philosophy of language, legal interpretation, philosophy of law, jurisprudence, vagueness in law and language

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## INTRODUCTION

Herbert Lionel Adolphus Hart (often cited as H.L.A. Hart), chair of jurisprudence and legal philosophy at Oxford University, is considered one of the world's leading philosophers of law in the analytic tradition of jurisprudence. He is often mentioned alongside his students Ronald Dworkin, Joseph Raz, and John Rawls, who have been a visiting scholar at Oxford University. In his magnum opus *The Concept of Law*, Hart sought to apply the philosophy of language to address questions of legal interpretation and to elucidate the nature of law. By doing so, he introduced the tools of analytic philosophy to clarify central issues in legal philosophy.

The overall aim of this paper is to revisit how Hart addresses issues in legal philosophy using the philosophy of language. The first part examines Hart's concept of law and the role of philosophy of language in jurisprudence. This section explores Hart's views on the determinacy and indeterminacy of linguistic communication in legal contexts, particularly his perspective on the vagueness of language and law. The second part considers objections to his use of the philosophy of language in his legal philosophy. Finally, the concluding section outlines the insights and lessons derived from this analysis, highlighting the critical role of the philosophy of language in understanding the nature of law.

## HART'S CONCEPT OF LAW AS THE UNION OF PRIMARY AND SECONDARY RULES

Hart identifies two distinct types of rules that constitute the essence of law: primary rules and secondary rules. In *The Concept of Law*, Hart (1994, 151) explains that the central theme of his book is the critical role played by two types of rules in understanding the unique functions of law and the foundational concepts of legal

thought. He argues that these rules are so integral to legal analysis that their combination can be seen as the "essence" of law, even though they may not always coexist in every context where the term "law" is appropriately applied. Hart (1994, 91–93) maintains that the law can most effectively be characterized as a union of primary rules of obligation and secondary rules. He refers to this union as the "heart of the legal system."

Hart (1994, 53) characterizes primary rules as basic rules or duty-imposing rules. These rules place specific obligations on the citizens of a state, requiring them to act in certain ways or face legal sanctions. Primary rules essentially dictate what individuals are permitted or prohibited from doing under the law. For example, laws that establish speed limits, ban firearms in the workplace, and prevent companies from forcing employees to donate to political campaigns are all examples of primary rules (Hart 1994, 78). In this context, primary rules reflect what the ordinary person commonly perceives as "the law."

Secondary rules, in contrast, are not duty-imposing rules. Hart (1994, 78–79) distinguishes between two types of rules. The first type, considered the primary or fundamental category, imposes obligations by requiring individuals to perform or refrain from specific actions, regardless of their personal desires. The second type, described as secondary rules, depends on the existence of primary rules. These secondary rules enable individuals to create, modify, or eliminate primary rules through specific actions or statements, and they also regulate how primary rules are applied. While primary rules impose duties, secondary rules grant powers, whether public or private.

Accordingly, secondary rules are power-conferring rules. They outline the processes by which primary rules can be recognized,



modified, and adjudicated. For example, they grant Congress the authority to legislate laws and provide private citizens with the right to vote. They also specify the procedures required to create a legal will. Secondary rules, therefore, are essentially rules about primary rules. According to Hart (1994, 92), secondary rules operate at a different level than primary rules because they focus on the primary rules themselves. While primary rules dictate what actions individuals are required to perform or avoid, secondary rules define how primary rules can be identified, created, modified, abolished, or enforced, as well as how violations of these rules can be definitively established.

Hart (1994, 95) argues that secondary rules are essential in any reasonably complex society. They can be categorized as “*rules of recognition*,” “*rules of change*,” or “*rules of adjudication*.” Rules of recognition provide a mechanism for determining what constitutes a legitimate primary rule. This eliminates doubts about whether a rule exists, as there is now a written reference that can be cited or appealed to. In other words, the “rule of recognition” functions like a standard meter (i.e., the Constitution), providing a framework for establishing legal validity. Thus, the law is valid if it meets the criterion of being recognized as law. In essence, any law or contract that violates a constitutional norm is considered *null* and *void* lacking any legal validity or effect, regardless of whether it originates from the legislative, the executive, or private agreements. As the Constitution is the fundamental and supreme law of the land, it is implicitly embedded in every statute and contract (See the *Doctrine of Constitutional Supremacy*).

The second category of secondary rules is rules of change. These are essential for enabling the efficient modification of primary rules. They outline the process by which primary rules can be changed. For example, the 1987 Philippine

Constitution can be amended by Congress, and laws can be revised through new legislation. In short, “rules of change” refer to the legislative processes for creating and repealing rules. These rules are crucial for the adaptability and evolution of legal systems, as they provide a structured process for responding to changing social, political, or economic conditions. Without rules of change, legal systems would become rigid and unable to address new challenges or correct outdated provisions. Rules of change ensure that laws remain relevant and effective over time, while maintaining legal stability through a formal process of amendment or repeal.

The third category of secondary rules is rules of adjudication. These rules are crucial for a legal system in a complex society, aiming to overcome the shortcomings of a system that relies only on primary rules (Hart 2012, 97). Rules of adjudication define the standards for identifying when a primary rule has been breached and outline the procedures to follow once a violation is confirmed. In other words, “rules of adjudication” are procedures designed to resolve legal disputes. These rules play a crucial role in ensuring that legal disputes are resolved fairly and consistently. Without rules of adjudication, there would be no clear mechanism for enforcing primary rules or for determining the consequences of their violation. They provide a structured framework for courts and other legal institutions to interpret the law, apply it to specific cases, and ensure justice is served. Additionally, rules of adjudication contribute to the stability and predictability of the legal system by establishing transparent processes for dispute resolution.



## THE APPLICATION OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE IN LEGAL PHILOSOPHY

Unlike Jeremy Bentham (1782, 1), who defines law as an “assemblage of signs” reflecting the will of the sovereign concerning the conduct expected of certain individuals or groups within their power, Hart (2012, 14–17) rejects this definition as helpful in legal philosophy. He argues that philosophers of law cannot resolve their issues by simply providing a definition of the term “law.” Instead, he suggests that the focus should be on understanding how the concept functions in language and exploring its various roles. Hart emphasizes that the philosophy of language plays a crucial role in offering a new approach to explaining the normativity of law, particularly in terms of conferring rights and powers and imposing obligations and liabilities.

Inspired by J.L. Austin (1962, 4), who argues that many philosophical problems can be resolved by examining the functions of words, Hart (2012, 80) similarly asserts that a statement of law is a “performative statement” rather than a statement of fact. In other words, stating the law is itself an act. In this regard, Bentham failed to account for the role of normative language in everyday discourse. He believed that a term like “right” must refer to an actual entity, and since no such entity could be directly perceived, he concluded that the word referred to a fictional entity (Bentham 1782, 251). Moreover, Hart (2012, 82) pointed out that Bentham’s account of the meaning of the words “duty” or “obligation” failed to distinguish, as people ordinarily do in everyday language, between the command of a gunman and a legal prescription.

Hart (2012, 82) contends that the reason the gunman scenario seems to illustrate the concept of obligation is that we would indeed say a person was obliged to give up his money

if he/she complied. However, it is just as clear that describing the situation as a person having an obligation or duty to surrender the money would be an inaccurate characterization. This indicates that a more nuanced understanding of the concept of obligation is necessary. There is an unresolved distinction between stating that someone was obliged to do something and claiming that they had an obligation to do so (Hart 1982, 105–130).

Moreover, as discussed previously, Hart argued that a legal system consists of “power-conferring and duty-imposing rules” that gain validity through a rule of recognition. In other words, this rule is legitimized by a social rule (Hart 2012, 255). Hart uses the philosophy of language to explain the normativity of law, particularly in his discussion of the fundamental concept of a social rule. He suggests that a social rule involves a shared behavioral pattern accompanied by a specific normative attitude (Hart 1994, 255). This attitude reflects individuals’ consistent tendency to regard these patterns as guides for their own actions and as standards for evaluating others. Hart’s focus was on speech acts, stating that for a social rule to exist, there must be a reflective, critical attitude toward certain behaviors as a common standard. This attitude is seen in acts of criticism (including self-criticism), demands for conformity, and the acknowledgment that such criticism and demands are justified. These elements are typically expressed through normative terms such as “*ought*,” “*must*,” “*should*,” “*right*,” and “*wrong*” (Hart 2012, 57).

As we have observed, Hart’s focus on normative language was less concerned with its meaning and more with the attitude that individuals express when using it. He distinguished between non-normative and normative statements primarily by emphasizing that the latter conveys a specific type of attitude. According to Hart, normative



statements are not just about conveying information; they reflect an individual's stance or disposition toward behavior, often signaling approval, disapproval, or a call for action. This distinction is important because it highlights the role of language in shaping social norms and guiding human conduct rather than merely describing it. Hart sought to reveal how legal systems and societal rules are rooted in these shared attitudes, ultimately linking language and law through the norms they both help create and enforce.

#### VAGUENESS IN LAW AND LANGUAGE: DETERMINACY AND INDETERMINACY

Hart argued that rule-skepticism in law is an exaggeration involving a serious misunderstanding of language. Although it is true that the English language is “irreducibly open-textured,” it is also true that general terms would be useless as a medium of communication unless there were familiar, generally unchallenged cases (Hart 1994, 123). Hart gives the example of a legal ordinance prohibiting the use of vehicles in public parks. Since the word “*vehicle*” is vague, it has many borderline cases. For instance, does the rule prohibit the use of bicycles, roller skates, or electric wheelchairs in the park? This question cannot be answered by examining the meaning of “vehicle” in English. However, Hart argues, the word “vehicle” has a core extension that includes things to which it clearly applies. An ordinary automobile, in good condition, is clearly a vehicle. Despite indeterminacies, there must be substantial information that can be expressed through linguistic communication in general and legal communication in particular (See Hart 1958).

Moreover, legal rules and decrees are certainly expressed in ordinary language. Some of that language may be technical and further specified

by other legal rules. However, understanding what the law prescribes depends on the general characteristics of linguistic communication. Hart (1994, 136) argues that the main mistake of legal realists (rule-skepticism) is focusing only on cases where the meanings of the sentences leave unanswered questions about what is asserted. In such cases, our use of the sentences results in vague, incomplete, or partially indeterminate content, which fails to provide definite decisions in some circumstances. Of course, there are many such cases. But as Hart (2012, 124) notes, a glass half empty is also half full. He argues that language could not be a useful tool for conveying information and guiding action if this were the norm. On the contrary, the meanings of the words we use, along with the obvious aspects of contexts of use, typically determine content with enough clarity to guide us in most communicative situations.

Hart's discussion of both determinacy and indeterminacy in linguistic communication within legal contexts opens the larger question of the role of language in determining the content of law. How much content is determined by the linguistic features of legal communication, and how much is left indeterminate or unspecified? (Hart 1994, 124–154). This problem has become central to the advancement of the philosophy of language in recent years. Although Hart's general conclusion—that the linguistic aspects of legal texts determine much content while leaving some legal issues indeterminate and open to interpretation—is commonsensical and correct, the philosophical payoff lies in the details, which are complex (See Marmor 2014, 85–92).

As we have seen, Hart acknowledges that vague predicates often have numerous borderline cases. These are situations where it is difficult to definitively determine whether a predicate applies to a given object. In such cases, Marmor





(2008) notes that we are often torn between conflicting views, resorting to ambiguous statements like *"It sort of is, and sort of isn't,"* *"It's not clearly one or the other,"* or *"It's up to you."* In Hart's example, whether a bicycle is a vehicle cannot be definitively answered. In some contexts, it may be acceptable to classify it as a vehicle, while in others, it may not be. There is no factual investigation that could determine which of these uses is correct and which is incorrect, as the meaning of the word "vehicle" does not resolve this ambiguity.

Furthermore, the concept of vague language can be applied to both the enactment and interpretation of laws (Hart 2012, 140). When lawmakers include a vague term in a legal text, they have two options: either leave the term to its standard interpretation or provide a more precise definition. In the first case, the term's application to ambiguous cases remains unresolved, leaving judicial or other legal authorities to interpret it in the future. In the second case, lawmakers seek to limit interpretive ambiguity by clarifying how the law should apply to specific borderline cases. For example, lawmakers implementing Hart's ordinance that prohibits vehicles in parks might respond to concerns for disabled individuals by explicitly specifying that, for the purposes of the ordinance, wheelchairs used by disabled persons, whether motorized or manual, are not considered vehicles. In such instances, the definition of "legally P" differs somewhat from the everyday meaning of "P" in the common language (See Soames 2011).

Additionally, the role of vagueness in legal interpretation is both intriguing and complicated. What should be done when a case's outcome depends on whether a vague predicate applies to an item, yet the predicate, as used by lawmakers, is undefined? (See Marmor 2014, 85). In principle, several outcomes are possible.

In some rare instances, the issue may be sent back to lawmakers for further clarification and precision. In other cases, a "rule of lenity" might require favorable decisions for defendants when no clear violation is evident. However, in many cases, judges and other legal authorities are tasked with addressing gaps by defining the relevant legal provision in a manner that was not specified or foreseen by lawmakers. When such a judicial ruling establishes a legal precedent for future cases, the interpretation goes beyond simply explaining, clarifying, or applying the law—it also alters it (Hart 1994, 66). Accordingly, understanding the consequences of vague language for legal interpretation is crucial, as some issues involving vagueness in the law are inherently normative. Consider, once again, the use of the vague term "vehicle" in Hart's ordinance. Could the lawmakers have drafted the prohibition more precisely? If they could have, was it a failure of legislative drafting? More generally, is avoidable vagueness always a flaw in the law, or can it sometimes serve as a useful legislative tool?

Finally, philosophers of law who examine the nature of law have highlighted language as a key component in the formation of political collectivism governed by law. However, language, as the medium of law, has also been recognized as a potential source of instability and uncertainty, leading to differing opinions among legal theorists and philosophers about its importance and role in law. Hutton (2009, 48) argues that if law is part of the social contract between citizens and the sovereign, and language serves as the medium for recording and explaining the law, then the terms of this contract, and language itself, become the primary means through which social order is established and maintained.

Thus, language bridges the private realm of individual thought with the public domain of



social exchange, enabling the creation of an ordered society through a reliable and stable means of communication. Just as a trustworthy currency is essential for facilitating commercial transactions, a stable and transparent medium for the exchange of ideas is fundamental to social and political life (Hutton 2009, 48). The significance of currency lies in its ability to reflect the values that support commercial exchange, and similarly, language must enable the accurate expression of the ideas and values that form the basis of society. Therefore, laws must be clear, and written in a manner that leaves no room for doubt about their meaning.

#### **OBJECTIONS TO H.L.A. HART'S USE OF PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE IN HIS LEGAL PHILOSOPHY**

Ronald Dworkin (1986, 4-6) points out that while philosophers of law hold a wide range of opinions, they generally agree on one key point: their field is deeply connected to the philosophy of language. However, Dworkin criticized Hart's approach, arguing that Hart's emphasis on language had a detrimental impact on his entire legal philosophy. According to Dworkin (1986, 45), Hart fell victim to a "semantic sting" by mistakenly assuming that lawyers adhere to specific linguistic criteria when evaluating legal propositions. Dworkin contends that we follow common rules when using any word, and these rules establish the criteria that determine the word's meaning.

Dworkin (1986, 31) further elaborates on his argument that our rules for using language in law link law to concrete historical facts. However, he emphasizes that this does not imply that all lawyers are consciously aware of these rules in a clear or systematic manner. He argues that we all follow rules inherent in our common

language, even if we are not fully conscious of them. We apply the same factual criteria when framing, accepting, or rejecting statements about what the law is, but we are often unaware of the exact criteria we use. Dworkin suggests that philosophers of law must uncover these underlying rules by carefully analyzing how we speak. While they may disagree on specific details, their shared assumption remains intact: we do, in fact, have a common set of standards for how the term "law" is used. Dworkin (1986, 32-33) criticized Hart for merely reworking the same approach as the more "candidly definitional" methods of Bentham and John Austin. According to Dworkin, this approach fails to offer satisfactory interpretations of legal practice.

Nevertheless, Joseph Raz, another student of Hart at Oxford University, offers a refinement to Hart's method. Raz co-edited the second edition of Hart's *The Concept of Law*, which includes a postscript featuring Hart's response to Dworkin's criticism of his work. Raz (1990, 175-177) argued that Hart did not attempt to define or elucidate ordinary uses of the term "law" or "legal validity", nor did he assume that such a definition of "law" is possible. Although Hart was influenced by prominent ordinary language philosophers of his time (e.g., J.L. Austin and later Wittgenstein), and, to some extent, shared their deference to ordinary usage in philosophical analysis, this did not often lead him or them to search for philosophically illuminating definitions. In contrast to Hart, Raz takes a more formalist approach to law. He emphasizes that the concept of law is not primarily defined by ordinary language but by its function and role within a system of governance. Raz rejects the idea that legal concepts can be fully understood by simply analyzing ordinary language usage, as Hart did. For Raz, the task of the philosophy of law is to identify the necessary



characteristics that constitute a legal system, focusing more on the authority and normative structures that make law authoritative rather than on the vague and shifting definitions of terms used in ordinary language. This focus on the role of law in maintaining social order leads Raz to an approach that seeks clarity in legal theory through conceptual analysis rather than deferring to ordinary language.

Accordingly, in Marmor's (2014, 4-6) analysis, Hart's *The Concept of Law* does not attempt to define law. As Hart (1994, 17) mentions in the early chapters of his book: *"The purpose of this book is not to provide a definition of law, in the essence of a rule by reference to which the correctness of the use of the word can be tested."* This statement reflects a critical aspect of Hart's legal philosophy. Rather than seeking a precise definition of law, Hart aims to explore its conceptual structure and the various roles it plays in society. This approach contrasts with the idea that law can be captured in a single, defining formula or essence. Hart's reluctance to define law directly is rooted in his understanding that law is a complex social phenomenon with different functions and interpretations depending on context. This view also anticipates some criticisms of reductionist legal theories, which attempt to encapsulate law in overly simplistic definitions.

### SOME IMPLICATIONS IN THE PHILOSOPHICAL STUDY OF LAW

The philosophy of language provides students with essential skills for critical questioning, analysis, and the ability to view facts and laws from diverse perspectives. It encourages an open-minded approach, focusing on the underlying essence of rules rather than merely adhering to their "literal meanings." As J.L. Austin (1961, 130) observes, *"When we examine what we should say when, what words we should*

*use in what situations, we are looking not merely at words (or meanings, whatever they may be) but also at the realities we use the words to talk about. We are using a sharpened awareness of words to sharpen our perception of the phenomena."* Therefore, the philosophy of language enhances our perception, developing a unique way of seeing that helps us identify hidden patterns behind the unfolding of events, especially in legal cases. As Wittgenstein points out, everyday experience shows that things are often not what they initially seem. Our judgments can be misleading, a truth that has been proven time and again.

Since we can be blind to certain aspects of reality, we must recognize that some dimensions of understanding can only be accessed if we are attuned to nuances, backgrounds, and the unsaid. We should not be deceived by the apparent clarity of things, as events often contain more than meets the eye. Thus, Wittgenstein (2011, 113-255) argues that philosophy's purpose is to challenge any limiting picture that confines us. The philosophy of language serves as a form of therapy that cures mental ailments such as prejudice, philosophical confusion, and narrow-mindedness. In other words, Wittgenstein suggests that a clearer understanding of language use can provide a solution for those grappling with philosophical dilemmas.

The philosophy of language plays a crucial role in honing the skills necessary for clear thinking and reasoning. In the context of law, it invites a more profound understanding of legal texts and cases by encouraging students to move beyond a superficial interpretation of words. This approach pushes individuals to engage with the deeper implications of language, developing a mindset that recognizes the complexity and nuance inherent in both legal systems and wider societal phenomena. Wittgenstein's notion of philosophy as "therapy" suggests





that language, when properly understood, can help untangle the conceptual knots that often hinder clear thinking. In legal contexts, this “therapy” becomes particularly important, as legal language can be riddled with ambiguities and assumptions. Training individuals to be sensitive to these subtleties, the philosophy of language aids in preventing misinterpretations and encourages a more comprehensive view of legal and philosophical problems. Moreover, Austin’s and Wittgenstein’s emphasis on context highlights the importance of not accepting the apparent meaning of words at face value. Just as legal judgments can often be influenced by unseen factors or overlooked details, the philosophy of language urges individuals to look beyond surface-level meanings and understand the fuller scope of their implications. In this way, it deepens our awareness and helps us navigate the complexities of the world, especially within the intricate framework of law.

#### Law as Language

Drawing from Wittgenstein’s influence, H.L.A. Hart’s conception of law allows us to understand law in a practical and instrumental sense. This perspective is particularly significant in common law systems, where legal concepts emerge from resolving real-world disputes rather than being derived from abstract general principles, as in the civil law tradition (Roman law). Hart enables us to view law as a distinct language with its own vocabulary to be learned and applied just like any other language. The meanings of legal terms, much like the meanings of words in any language, are determined by their use in specific contexts. As the context shifts, so, too, can the meaning. Viewing law as a language and interpreting language through Hart’s legal philosophy helps us understand legal and constitutional changes as natural and expected outcomes of how we use words. In this way, the law evolves with the people it governs.

It is created and adjusted as society changes. Hence, the goal of a philosophical inquiry into law should be to examine the current situation because attempting to study law through fixed definitions, detached from context, results in an artificial “language game.”

Finally, understanding law and language from Hart’s perspective helps us realize that law is not a product of religious or theological ideals but rather a social construct (a convention) formed by those who use it. Law is human-made, shaped by socially accepted rules that evolve over time. Hart emphasizes that legal systems are built upon the recognition of such rules by society, and their legitimacy stems from the general acceptance and observance of these norms rather than divine (God) or natural mandates. An example of this is the consensus on traffic regulations, such as choosing the color of traffic lights or deciding which side of the road to drive on. In countries like Hong Kong, Japan, and Australia, motorists drive on the left, while in the U.S. and the Philippines, they drive on the right. There is no inherent morality in whether a country drives left or right; these are simply human-made and socially agreed-upon rules. In this sense, these conventions are not rooted in any absolute truth or divine directive but in the practical considerations of social coordination and safety.

This illustrates Hart’s view that legal rules are part of a social practice. They derive their force from the collective agreement of those within a society and are subject to change as societal needs and norms evolve. It is not the inherent nature of the law that dictates its form but rather the human beings who establish and uphold it. The diversity of traffic rules across countries is just one example of how law can be shaped by culture, history, and the pragmatic needs of communities rather than by any universal or natural principles.



## CONCLUSION

This paper has attempted to examine how the philosophy of language is used in the hope of shedding light on the nature of law. It investigates the potential value of the philosophy of language in formulating a theory of law that addresses society's needs for stability and development. Nevertheless, the philosophy of language is not as widely discussed in jurisprudence and legal philosophy. However, there is now a growing body of literature that applies the philosophy of language to legal problems, especially following Hart's publication of his famous work *The Concept of Law*. Today, philosophers of law regard the philosophy of language as a useful tool in analyzing statutory law. Hart has made the use of the philosophy of language a necessary and natural part of philosophical studies in law. He recognizes that the significance of legal notions changes depending on the context in which they are used. Words derive their meanings from their use in a particular context. Thus, a single word can have various meanings depending on how it is used and the context in which it appears. Similarly, the meanings of legal or constitutional terms may shift as evolving social needs and values lead to the adoption of new interpretations in different social, economic, and political settings. However, the meaning of a word is always constrained by the context in which it is applied.

It must be borne in mind that lawmakers cannot assign any meaning to legal and constitutional terms or incorporate arbitrary values into the law. As Hart asserts, they can only adopt meanings that align with the values and needs of society. Lawmakers may depart from established meanings of words because stability itself is a valued social principle. Change can only occur in specific situations where the meaning of a word, assigned in one context, no longer aligns with the values and needs of a new or altered context.

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