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Writing Assignment 2
Due 25 November

A **contronym**, also known as an **auto-antonym**, is a word that has **two meanings that are opposites of each other**. Here are some examples:

> *fast*:
>> means 'fixed in one place' (e.g., *stuck fast in the ground*)
>> means 'moving rapidly' (e.g., *walking very fast*)
> *sanction*:
>> means 'allow' (e.g., *I refuse to sanction this immoral behavior.*)
>> means 'punish' (e.g., *The U.N. voted to sanction North Korea's policies.*)

Your assignment is to **discuss how these words came to have two opposite meanings**, and then **compare** them to *cleave*, another word that appears to have two more or less opposite meanings:

> *cleave*:
>> means 'cut into pieces' (e.g., *The deli attendant cleaves up a block of cheese.*)
>> means 'cling tightly' (e.g., *The translator cleaves to the text's literal meaning.*)

Look up these words **in the *Oxford English Dictionary***, since it's the only dictionary with **reliable, in-depth data** on the history of the meanings of words.

Remember how the *OED* groups together meanings of a word to show its history: major senses are **numbered** (1), (2), etc. and listed in **chronological order** by when they were **first used**; but within a major sense there might be several sub-meanings, lettered (a), (b), etc., listed in chronological order **within** the major sense.

In an **essay of 1–2 pages** (i.e., about 600–800 words):
- Describe the history of *fast* and *sanction*:
  - What were their **original** meanings?
  - What **type or types** of semantic change caused them to develop opposite meanings? Was metaphor or metonymy involved? Weakening, strengthening, narrowing, widening, etc.?
  - For each word, is one of the two meanings ultimately **derived from the other**, or do both meanings derive from an earlier third meaning? Or something else?
- Compare *cleave* with *fast* and *sanction*. In your opinion, should *cleave* be considered to be in **the same category** as *fast* and *sanction*?—i.e., does it make sense to consider it a contronym too? Why or why not? Make sure your opinion takes into account the **etymology** of *cleave*, not just its meanings.

Your essay is due **on paper** at the beginning of your tutorial on **November 25th**.

How to read an *OED* entry with multiple meanings

The *OED* groups the definitions of polysemous words into categories of closely related definitions. The categories are listed in chronological order by the **first known usage** of the word with a meaning in that category, and **within** the categories the definitions are also listed in chronological order. Here's an (abbreviated) example, showing the word *car*:

car
1.
   a. A wheeled, usually horse-drawn conveyance; a carriage, cart, or wagon. (1320)
   b. A chariot, esp. of war, triumph, splendour, or pageantry. (1350)
   c. A vehicle resembling a cart without wheels; a sleigh. (1488)
2.
   a. The passenger compartment of a balloon, airship, cableway, etc. (1783)
   b. The passenger compartment or cage of an elevator or lift. (1847)
3.
   a. A railway carriage or wagon. (1826)
   b. As many or as much as a railway car will hold. (1851)
4. A motor car. (1896).

Each definition is accompanied by multiple dated **quotations** (omitted above, for space reasons; I've only given the **date** of the **earliest** quotation) that can give you a more in-depth idea of the contexts each definition of the word appears in.

Note that the definitions **themselves** aren't necessarily all **individually** in chronological order—definition (3a) of *car* is older than (2b). But they're in order **by category**.

The order in which the meanings of a word originated does not necessarily tell you exactly **how the meanings originated** and developed into one another, but it can give you a general idea, and it can rule out some possibilities. For example, from the entry for *car*, you can tell that the meaning 'passenger compartment' didn't originate **from** the meaning 'automobile', since the 'passenger compartment' meaning is a century older.

You'll definitely need to **cite** *OED* definitions for this assignment. On the online *OED*, there's a "Cite" link at the top right corner of a word's entry that will show you the proper format for citing a definition.