It does not occur to a modern mathematician that a collection of mathematical symbols should have a "meaning" until one has been assigned to it by definition. It was not a triviality even to the greatest mathematicians of the eighteenth century. They had not the habit of definition: it was not natural to them to say, in so many words, "by X we mean Y." There are reservations to be made,... but it is broadly true to say that mathematicians before Cauchy asked not "How shall we define $1 - 1 + 1 - ...$" but "What is $1 - 1 + 1 - ...,$" and this habit of mind led them into unnecessary perplexities and controversies which were often really verbal.

— G. H. Hardy. *A Mathematician's Apology*, 1940
(on Grandi's series)