

WITTGENSTEIN, Kripkenstein, and the Skeptical Paradox

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Saul Kripke, in his work *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, presents an interpretation of Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* whereby Wittgenstein is taken to be offering a paradox with respect to language. The paradox, according to Kripke, stems from the nonexistence of facts which establish claims about what a speaker meant by a particular term on a given occasion, and threatens the very possibility of rule-following and language. Kripke interprets Wittgenstein as offering a solution to this problem that rejects truth-conditional semantics and in its place establishes a theory focusing on conditions of warranted assertion. In this thesis, it is argued that Kripke's interpretation of Wittgenstein is incorrect. Examination of the text of the *Philosophical Investigations* reveals a much more complicated view of language than Kripke offers, and certain passages conflict directly with the interpretation given.

This thesis, in addition to the exegetical question of the appropriateness of Kripke's interpretation, is also concerned with the skeptical challenge posed in *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*. Kripke's skeptical solution to this problem is examined and found wanting in several respects. Once the notion of warranted assertion is spelled out in terms of communal agreement, it becomes clear that Kripke has not answered the skeptic at all, as claims about

meaning entail claims about correct use, and communal agreement, a statistical notion, cannot ground such claims.

Having found the skeptical solution unsatisfactory, the thesis focuses on direct answers to the skeptic, whereby certain types of fact are submitted as meaning-fixing facts. The most popular of these answers are those which cite a speaker's dispositions to behave with respect to a given word in hypothetical situations. There are several different varieties of dispositionalism, and the most prominent are discussed. It is contended that Saul Kripke's objections to dispositionalism are correct, and that no version of dispositionalism can serve as an answer to the skeptic.

Dispositionalism is an attempt to reduce semantic facts to behavioral facts. The question is raised as to why this is necessary. It is suggested that there is no *prima facie* reason to think that semantic or normative facts are unsuitable as answers to Kripke's skeptic, and several objections to non-reductionism are considered and rejected. While a fully developed non-reductive theory is beyond the scope of this thesis, some groundwork is done, paving the way for such a theory.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In §1 of the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein presents an account of language drawn from a passage of St. Augustine's *Confessions*. In this passage, Augustine recounts how he learned the meaning of words as a child:

When they (my elders) named some object, and accordingly moved towards something, I saw this and I grasped that the thing was called by the sound they uttered when they meant to point it out. Their intention was shewn by their bodily movements, as it were the natural language of all peoples: the expression of the face, the play of the eyes, the movement of other parts of the body, and the tone of voice which expresses our state of mind in seeking, having, rejecting, or avoiding something. Thus, as I heard words repeatedly used in their proper places in various sentences, I gradually leant to understand what objects they signified; and after I had trained my mouth to form these signs, I used them to express my own desires.¹

This account has two important features. The first is that words are used to name objects. If this alone is the function of a word, then it would seem that the meaning of that word is the object named. Meaningfulness in general, according to this account, is a matter of a word picking out some object. The second feature is that the learning and teaching of a language is done ostensively. Understanding of a word rests on observation of its use by competent speakers of the language, or on a more direct method of explanation, exemplified by pointing towards the intended object and uttering "This is called 'x'."

That the first feature of the Augustinian account has been found in the writings of other philosophers subsequent to Augustine, including the early Wittgenstein, testifies to its appeal.

¹Augustine, *Confessions*, I.8 as recounted in Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* §1 footnote 1.

One can see this in the picture theory in the *Tractatus*.² Wittgenstein asserts that “simple signs” have as their meanings the objects that they name.³ According to the *Tractatus*, the world is made up of facts: states of affairs which obtain. States of affairs are combinations of objects, and are represented by propositions, whose structures are isomorphic to the states of affairs that they represent (and so propositions are facts as well, namely, the fact that their constituents are arranged in a certain way). Words constitute the elements of a proposition, and name the objects in the relevant state of affairs, for which they are the counterparts.⁴ There is some departure from the Augustinian account in the *Tractatus*, to be sure. While Wittgenstein takes most of our words to have as their meaning the objects that they name, he points out that certain words do not seem to name anything. Logical operators that appear in propositions, for example, don’t represent any object in the world. But these are exceptional.

The *Tractatus* presents a theory which is much more sophisticated than the account given in §1. It was, however, developed under some of the same presuppositions about language found in the primitive account. One of Wittgenstein’s goals in the *Investigations* is to examine these presuppositions and to expose their failings. The first fifth of the *Investigations* is dedicated to this task.⁵ In addition to challenging these presuppositions, Wittgenstein has a positive goal, that of offering suggestions that will allow philosophers to properly orient their thinking with respect

²Indeed, in the summary of part I, § 19 of *Philosophical Grammar*, Wittgenstein writes “My earlier concept of meaning originates in a primitive philosophy of language. - Augustine on the learning of language. He describes a calculus of our language, only not everything that we call language is this calculus.”

³Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. New York, 1974, 3.203.

⁴Ibid., 4.22.

⁵This figure comes from Robert Fogelin’s *Wittgenstein*.

to language. In particular, he seeks to dissolve problems that arise from misconceived notions of meaning and understanding.

The notion that a word's meaning is the object that it picks out rests on a overly simplistic view of the variety of roles that words can play in a language. In §1, Wittgenstein remarks that the Augustinian account doesn't take into account the variety of words, but rather focuses on nouns, names, and to some extent properties. If one considers proper names, then it is easy to see how this view is motivated. According to a direct-reference theory, a proper name picks out a unique object, and if a proper name could be said to have a meaning, then it seems sensible that the meaning just *is* the object that it names. With a little work, the view could be extended to apply to regular nouns and adjectives, with the latter being treated as the names of properties, for example.

If, however, one considers all the different kinds of words that are found in language, it becomes difficult to maintain this account. Wittgenstein illustrates this in §1 of the *Investigations* with the grocery-list example. Imagine a grocer who is handed a slip on which the words ‘five red apples’ has been written. The grocer opens the apple drawer, consults a color chart to match the apples, and counts from one to five, taking an apple out for each number. The various acts that the grocer performs relevant to the different words is supposed to show the differences between the types of words in question. The word ‘apple’ may be used to pick out a particular type of object, but the word ‘five’ doesn’t seem to be used in the same way.

Having located what he believes to be the primary misunderstanding motivating the account of meaning that he attributes to Augustine, namely, that all words function as proper names, Wittgenstein presents an alternative. He connects meaning with use. Meaningfulness in general is having a use, and the meaning of a particular word is given by the way that the word is

used. Of course, not just any use of a word is relevant. Any theory of meaning must account for correct and incorrect usage. Mere regularities in the way that words are used do not necessarily reveal correct usage. They show only how words are, in fact, used. Statements about regularities only describe word use, they do not prescribe. The implication of this is that there must be rules that are to be obeyed in order for a use of a word to be correct. Rules, unlike mere regularities, are prescriptive, and as such are capable of grounding the notion of correctness and incorrectness with respect to the application of words.

The use of a word in a language, then, is a rule-governed activity. With this consideration in mind, Wittgenstein draws an analogy between language use and playing chess.⁶ Here, the chess pieces correspond with words, and meanings correspond with the rules governing the appropriate moves of the pieces. This analogy is useful, but one should not take it too far. The rules governing the use of an individual chess piece are fairly circumscribed, and the variety of chess pieces is not great. The rules governing the use of individual words, however, are likely to be much more complex, allowing for a much greater number of “moves” that one can make. The variety of words exceeds the rather modest variety of chess pieces. Nevertheless, the chess analogy, though perhaps over simple, is helpful in understanding the view of language in Wittgenstein’s later works. Language is like a game. Language, like games, is an activity pursued according to certain rules, rules which are not imposed upon it from without, but are rather the constructs of the community of players. Understanding a language is similar to understanding chess: as the latter is exhibited in the playing of the game, the former is exhibited in the speaking of the language.

⁶Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. Oxford, 1953, §31.

To say that meaning is connected with rule-governed use is not strikingly illuminating. A host of questions arise from such a characterization. What exactly counts as a rule? What does participation in a rule-governed activity consist in? What is involved in understanding the demands of a rule? Wittgenstein dedicates a significant portion of the *Investigations*, from around §143-§242, to questions such as these. Clearly, if one is to have a firm grasp of Wittgenstein's thoughts on meaning, one must attend to these sections with care. One of the goals of this thesis, and arguably the most difficult to accomplish, will be to examine these sections with the aim of arriving at a clear view of Wittgenstein's position on the nature of rules and rule following, and how these are related to the possibility of meaning. To preview what will follow: It will be argued that when Wittgenstein speaks of rules, he refers to statements given to justify, explain, or teach certain behavior. Understanding which actions count as being in accordance with a rule, according to Wittgenstein, is the ability to engage in certain normative behavior (such as the aforementioned acts of justification, explanation, and teaching) with respect to a rule.

Saul Kripke's interpretation of Wittgenstein's often cryptic remarks on rule-following have become the focus of an intense scrutiny over the past two decades. According to Kripke, Wittgenstein was presenting a skeptical paradox regarding language. Not much work is done by Kripke in attempting to justify this reading of Wittgenstein, but the first sentence of §201 of the *Investigations* is specifically singled out: "This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because any course of action can be made out to accord with the rule." It is possible, of course, to understand a rule, but to make a mistake as to what the rule requires in a given situation. What is being suggested here, and in earlier passages of the *Investigations*, is more radical than this rather pedestrian observation. One might be inclined to think that a given

rule can be applied or misapplied to a given situation. Correct application of a rule implies the existence of an interpretation of the rule which determines which actions accord with it. This interpretation, though, runs into the same problem, and seems to require a further interpretation, which itself stands in need of an interpretation, and so on *ad infinitum*.

Wittgenstein gives an example in §185 which can be of some help in illustrating this. A student of arithmetic has been given a task of writing a series of numbers, starting from 0, and increasing by 2 at every step. He performs the task well up to 1000, upon which he proceeds by writing “1004, 1008, 1012, ...” One is inclined to say that the student misunderstood the rule by which he was supposed to act. Yet it can also be said that he proceeded according to the rule as he interpreted it. The student was ordered to proceed by the rule “Add 2 to the previous number in the series,” but interpreted the rule as “Add 2 to the previous number in the series up to 1000, and add 4 following that.” So the student, in proceeding by adding 4 after 1000, was acting in accordance with the rule that interpreted. This case can be generalized: every action can be said to accord with some rule under some interpretation. This threatens the distinction between correct and incorrect ways of responding to rules. The concepts of correctness and incorrectness rest on the notion of an act being in accord or disaccord with a rule, but if the example of §185 shows that any action can be in accord with a rule, then any act can be considered correct. Furthermore, if any action can be in accord with a rule upon some interpretation, then any act can similarly be said to violate a rule upon some interpretation. It gets worse: for if meaning is connected with rule-governed use, but the notion of acting in accordance with a rule is hollow (as the above example attempts to show), then it would seem that the concept of meaning itself is unintelligible.

It is considerations such as these that Kripke sees as indicating that Wittgenstein was presenting a skeptical paradox with respect to meaning. In the third section of his book *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, he writes

There can be no such thing as meaning anything by any word. Each new application we make is a leap in the dark; any present intention could be interpreted so as to accord with anything we may choose to do. So there can be neither accord, nor conflict.⁷

Though Kripke does little to show that Wittgenstein truly had this paradox in mind when he wrote the *Investigations*, he does offer some independent reasons for thinking that a paradox of this sort exists. It comes in the form of a challenge from a skeptic regarding the past and present use of the word ‘plus’. The reader is asked to assume that though he has used the word ‘plus’ and the symbol ‘+’ many times in the past, he has never performed any computations with numbers larger than 57. When asked to compute ‘68+57’ he responds that the answer is ‘125’. The skeptic challenges this answer, and claims that the correct response is ‘5’. The skeptic claims that in the past, ‘plus’ and ‘+’ were used not to denote the function plus, but rather, the function quus. Kripke’s skeptic defines quus as follows:

$$\begin{aligned}x \oplus y &= x + y, \text{ if } x, y < 57 \\&= 5 \text{ otherwise.}^8\end{aligned}$$

By hypothesis, every action that was undertaken in the past in which ‘plus’ or ‘+’ was used is compatible with the person’s having meant quus instead of plus. The question is whether any fact can be found that establishes that the answer of ‘125’ to the problem given is the right one. The skeptic claims that no fact, behavioral or mental, about the past usage of these terms can be found to establish that one meant plus rather than quus, or that ‘125’ is indeed the right

⁷Saul Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*. Cambridge, 1982, p.55.

⁸Ibid., p.9.

answer to ‘68+57’. Kripke sees the upshot of this as devastating: “Wittgenstein’s main problem is that it appears that he has shown *all* language, *all* concept formation, to be impossible, indeed unintelligible.”⁹

Of course, any argument that purports to show that language is impossible will be self-refuting. Kripke interprets Wittgenstein as offering a solution to the skeptic, but a solution which grants the skeptic’s premise. According to Kripke, Wittgenstein denies the existence of meaning-fixing facts. He is able to reject the skeptic’s conclusion because he rejects a picture of language according to which claims about meaning have truth-conditions, that is, admit of evaluation as true or false. There are no facts which make true claims of the sort “S meant *m* by ‘w’”, but this does not show that language is impossible.

Two important questions emerge from this. First, is Kripke right in thinking that Wittgenstein presents a skeptical paradox in the *Investigations*? As Kripke drew from Wittgenstein’s comments on rule-following, a study of sections §143-§242 should help illuminate this question. Again, as a preview, I will contend that though Wittgenstein does attempt to show that there is a problem with a particular view of what it is to follow a rule, that he does not present the skeptical paradox Kripke describes. The second question to consider is whether Kripke’s skeptical solution to the problem, considered independently of whether it is properly attributable to Wittgenstein, is tenable. Once this solution is spelled out, I will argue that it is not a satisfactory answer to the skeptic.

Finally, I will consider alternative answers to the skeptic. One of the most common responses is to offer up facts about the dispositions of a speaker, or the dispositions of a select group of speakers, as those which establish the meaning of a term. Such a strategy is reductive,

⁹Ibid., p.62.

insofar as it is an attempt to ground semantic or normative facts and explain them by reference to purely naturalistic facts about behavior. There are several versions of dispositionalism, each attempting to identify a particular sort of disposition as the meaning-fixing one. I will argue that none of the more prominent versions succeed, and that no version can answer the skeptic. However, the failure of Kripke's response as well as that of the reductivist should not lead to an adoption of skepticism. In chapter 4, I suggest a fourth way of responding that is non-reductive and denies both the skeptic's premises and his conclusion.

CHAPTER 2

WITTGENSTEIN ON MEANING, UNDERSTANDING, AND RULES

The purpose of this chapter is to develop a better understanding of Wittgenstein's views on meaning, understanding, and rule-following, in the hopes that this will provide the ammunition for an attack on Kripke's interpretation of the *Investigations*. Getting clear on Wittgenstein's comments on meaning and understanding is essential for understanding his views on private languages and rules. Of particular importance are Wittgenstein's claims that a word's meaning is connected with its use, and that understanding is a practice rather than a mental state. In what follows, I will elaborate on these claims and the reasons for holding them.

Live and Dead Signs

In the first few pages of *The Blue Book* and in §432 of the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein asks what it is that distinguishes the "live" signs of language from the "dead" signs that are found in nature. A sign is an object characterized by its "shape", broadly speaking. Signs include such things as written symbols, sounds, and gestures, among other things. There are sign types and sign tokens, and tokens of a particular type can be either live or dead. Sign types are neither.

Live signs are meaningful; they are those signs that humans use to communicate with one another. These signs possess certain features that those not produced by linguistic beings lack, features which are essential to their use in communication. Whether or not a sign is "live" or "dead" is not intrinsic to the sign itself. Two sign tokens of the same type, one of which is produced by a human, and the other by a natural process, can differ in respect to whether they mean anything. The scribblings of a colleague on a bit of paper having the appearance

Stop

are taken to be meaningful when handed to a person distractedly tapping his foot during a tedious philosophy lecture. To be precise, this sign would be taken as a command that he cease his foot-tapping. On the other hand, the marks in a patch of sand made by a traveling snail which have the exact same appearance, while quite extraordinary, would not be taken as an indication that the snail meant for someone to stop doing something, or meant anything at all. The signs, two tokens of the same type, differ with respect to whether or not they mean anything.

Though evidently there must be some property that living signs have that dead signs lack, characterizing the property is a difficult task. The fact that meaningful signs are produced exclusively by creatures with mental lives, or by entities standing proxy for minded creatures (translation devices, video and audio projectors, telegraph machines, e.g.) may lead one to think that a sign is meaningful only if its use is accompanied by, traceable to, or produces some special sort of mental activity such as understanding or meaning. Wittgenstein anticipates this suggestion:

It seems that there are *certain definite* processes bound up with the working of language, processes through which alone language can function. I mean the processes of understanding and meaning. The signs of our language seem dead without these mental processes; and it might seem that the only function of the signs is to induce such processes, and that these are the things we ought really to be interested in. Thus, if you are asked what is the relation between a name and the thing it names, you will be inclined to answer that the relation is a psychological one, and perhaps when you say this you think in particular of the mechanism of association.¹

If this view is correct, then the property that distinguishes live signs from dead ones is that of being accompanied by (in one way or another) a special mental process. For the word

¹Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue Book*. New York, 1960 p. 3.

'red' to be meaningful, then, for example, it would have to be the case that whenever it is uttered, the speaker has a certain mental state, perhaps that of picturing the color red to himself, and anyone who understands the sign likewise has that mental state.

Wittgenstein challenges this picture of meaning and understanding by asking the reader to suppose that the mental process is replaced by a similar outward process. Instead of someone imagining the color red, suppose he consults a color chart whenever he is called upon to use (be the use interpretive or expressive²), the word 'red' (for the purposes of this thought experiment, a consultation should be taken as consisting exclusively of outward behavior, such as the movement of a finger across the chart from the symbol 'red' to a color patch). This doesn't have the intuitive force of the original example from the previous paragraph. It doesn't seem that the outward act of consulting the chart accompanying the utterance suffices to make the word being used meaningful. Consulting a color chart just following the utterance of the word 'red', explained in purely behavioral terms, is to be the sort of activity that a well-programmed robot (something that is generally thought not to be capable of understanding) could do.

Wittgenstein's comments on this are a sketchy; some interpretative work is required. The original thought was that some mental process which coexisted with an utterance or a sign served to make that utterance or sign meaningful. Wittgenstein then suggests that outward processes be substituted for mental ones:

²I have borrowed the distinction between interpretative and expressive uses from Alan Millar's article "The Normativity of Meaning," *Philosophy: The Journal of the Royal Institute of Philosophy*, vol. 51 p.57-73. The distinction is intended to capture both passive and active uses of a word, where the user is a "listener" and a "speaker" respectively.

There is one way of avoiding at least partly the occult appearance of the processes of thinking, and it is, to replace in these processes any working of the imagination by acts of looking at real objects.³

Shortly following this passage, he shifts and speaks of a substitution of the *objects* of these processes, specifically painted images and mental images respectively:

If the meaning of the sign... is an image built up in our minds when we see or hear the sign, then first let us adopt the method we just described of replacing this mental image by some outward object seen, e.g. a painted or modeled image.⁴

Presumably, he felt that the actions involved were similar enough to justify this shift in focus from processes to objects, that the only relevant difference between imagining a color and picking out a color patch on a chart was the type of image involved. Whether this move is in fact warranted or not is debatable. For now, this concern should be put aside in favor of getting clear on other aspects of Wittgenstein's reasoning in this matter.

In *The Blue Book*, Wittgenstein claims that a painted image fails to "impart any life to the sentence"⁵ that it accompanies. This view can be fleshed out as follows. A swatch of red is not, on its own, meaningful. It may be used in communication, certainly, but in any instance where it is, there is some feature of the context which makes it meaningful. In this way, the swatch has the same status as a word divorced from whatever property makes it meaningful; it is, in short, dead. Substituting the swatch for a mental image has the effect of placing on it the burden of making the utterance of the word 'red' meaningful, and this, according to the view in question, is something that a dead sign cannot do.

³Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue Book*. New York, 1960 p. 4.

⁴Ibid., p.5.

⁵Ibid.

Under the view in question (allowing for Wittgenstein's focus on the object rather than the act), a mental image *is* capable of conferring meaning. The question is what feature of a mental image gives it this ability. If a dead sign lacks this ability, perhaps the mental image is itself a live sign. Its being live could not be the result of coexisting with another mental image as that would result in a regress, for that additional mental image would either be live or dead, and if dead of no use, and if alive itself requiring, by the same argument, some distinct associated mental image, and so on. Instead, this life would have to be something intrinsic to the mental image, and something capable of giving life to dead signs (though how it does this is not at all clear). Wittgenstein rejects this line of thinking. To say that mental objects have this ability but to be unable to say how, or to give any in-depth explanation of it, would be to attribute to mental objects "occult" properties.

The Augustinian account Wittgenstein discusses in §1 may fall prey to the charge that it appeals to such occult properties. Recall that the central feature of this account was that words function as names of objects; for a word to have a meaning, is for it to name something. The relationship between a name and the thing named must be made explicit, and Wittgenstein's focus on "mentalistic" accounts of understanding and meaning in the opening pages of *The Blue Book* indicate that he believes that this relationship is usually taken to be psychological. Meaning, in the Augustinian sense, would, if the above considerations are correct, involve a mental process which cannot fully be explained. Any account involving essential but mysterious elements is, of course, at a serious disadvantage, all else being equal, in comparison to an account involving elements whose natures are entirely explicable. Another approach is needed.

Wittgenstein rejects the possibility that either an outward process or a mental process accompanying a word can make the word meaningful. He concludes that the mistake is to think

that *anything* accompanying a word makes it meaningful. The Augustinian account seems to labor under this mistaken idea, and so should be viewed as suspect. Here can be seen the first hints that Wittgenstein's account of meaning won't turn out to be very tidy.

In the preceding chapter, another deficiency of the Augustinian account was noted. The central topic of the first dozen or so passages of the *Philosophical Investigations* is the rejection of the oversimplified view that a word's meaning is the object that it names. This view has proven seductive. It can be found in the works of Frege, Russell, and the early Wittgenstein, among others.⁶ The objection to this view is not that it is false that words name objects (though not in the sense of naming found in the *Tractatus*, in which a word stands for the object it names in a representation whose structure is isomorphic with a possible state of affairs), but rather, that such a characterization doesn't accurately reflect the complexity of natural language.

Augustine, we might say, does describe a system of communication; only not everything that we call language is this system. And one has to say this in many cases where the question arises "Is this an appropriate description or not?" The answer is: "Yes, it is appropriate, but only for this narrowly circumscribed region, not for the whole of what you were claiming to describe."⁷

Of course, if Wittgenstein's comments from *The Blue Book* are any indication, Augustine's account still suffers from the mistaken idea that a mental process must accompany the use of a word in order for the word to be meaningful. The comments here, though, seem to presuppose that an account of naming has been found which requires no such accompaniment.⁸

⁶For further discussion of the influence of the Augustinian account on these thinkers, see G.P. Baker and M.S. Hacker *Wittgenstein: Understanding and Meaning Part I: Essays*. Oxford, 2005, pp. 19-28.

⁷Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. Oxford, 1953, §3.

⁸See the grocer's list example in §1 for an illustration of what this might look like.

Naming, then, is a perfectly legitimate use of a word. It is not, however, the only legitimate use. Imperatives, interrogatives, color-terms and logical connectives don't seem to name anything unless one is to posit a very rich ontology. Yet even if one were to do so, to describe these words as naming various objects would be to obscure the very different ways in which they are used. In §11, Wittgenstein compares the corpus of words to tools in a tool-box, and the variety of functions of words to the variety of functions of the tools within. He writes:

Imagine someone's saying: "All tools serve to modify something. Thus a hammer modifies the position of a nail, a saw the shape of a board, and so on." - And what is modified by a rule, a glue-pot, and nails? - "Our knowledge of a thing's length, the temperature of the glue, and the solidity of a box." - Would anything be gained by this assimilation of expressions?⁹

Saying "All tools serve to modify something" is akin to saying "all words name something," in that important differences among the relevant body of things are glossed over in an attempt to provide a uniform characterization which, in the end, is quite uninformative.

Meaning as Use

What is needed is an account of meaning that respects the variety of functions that words may have. The emphasis that Wittgenstein gives to this points the way to the desired account: the meaning of a word is determined by the use that word has in communication. This is explicitly stated in the opening pages of *The Blue Book*: "But if we had to name anything which is the life of the sign, we should have to say that it was its *use*."¹⁰ It is implied in the discussion of the grocer's list in §1, with the introduction of the notion of a language-game in §7, is made explicit in the discussion of ostensive definitions of §30: "an ostensive definition explains the use - the

⁹Ibid., §14.

¹⁰Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books*. Oxford, 1958, p.4.

meaning - of a word when the overall role of the word in language is clear," and once again (though with a bit of caution) in §43: "For a *large* class of cases - though not for all - in which we employ the word "meaning" it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language."

The use of a word can be seen as the behavior that occurs before, during, and after its utterance. Consider the primitive language introduced in §2. One might be inclined to view the sparse vocabulary of this language ('block', 'pillar', 'slab', 'beam') as consisting of the names of objects. This seems appropriate as within the context in which language is employed, there are four types of objects associated with the use of each of the four words. In thinking of these words as names of objects, though, one would ignore a crucial feature of their use: they function exclusively as commands. The master builder calls out one of the words when he wishes his assistant to bring him the corresponding stone. The assistant, upon hearing the master call out, selects a stone from the appropriate stack, and delivers it to the master. The actions of the master involving each word, and the assistant's reactions to those, constitute the use in this language of those words. Meaning is thus tied to a practice which occurs over time - a word cannot have a meaning outside of any such practice. Wittgenstein thus has the makings of an answer to the question posed at the outset of this chapter: a live sign is one which has a role in the activities of those who employ it. There must be a regularity in the use of a word for it to be meaningful.

The Language-Game Analogy

In his later writings, Wittgenstein developed an analogy comparing the use of language to playing a game. He calls the activity in §2 between the master carpenter and his assistant a language-game. While it is billed as a complete primitive language, it is also a practice that occurs in complex natural languages. Though this account is a bit simplified, the game that the

master and the assistant plays is one of many different types of activities that can be found in language. In calling this activity a game, Wittgenstein is making a number of suggestions about the way a language works.

When one plays a game, one has to abide by certain rules in order to be said to play the game correctly. Not just any move in chess is appropriate; one cannot, for example, move a rook diagonally and be said to playing chess properly. So too with language. While meaning is connected with use, not just any use of a word is correct. For there to be correctness and incorrectness in word usage, there must be rules of word-usage, and conformity to those rules is a necessary condition for proper use.

The rules of a game are conventional insofar as they are the products of those who play the games; the same is true for language. The rules governing word-usage and sentence formation are not imposed from outside of the system. This idea is explicitly addressed in a later section of the *Philosophical Investigations*: “The rules of grammar may be called “arbitrary”, if that is to mean that the *aim* of grammar is nothing but that of the language.”¹¹ This view of the nature of the rules of language represents a significant change in Wittgenstein’s thought from his Tractarian days, when he was inclined to believe that the rules of language *were* imposed from without - the rules of language were the rules of logic.

The diversity that one finds when one considers the different types of games is mirrored in the diversity in the various functions of language. In his comments on family resemblances, Wittgenstein remarks that there is no set of features, nor any one feature that is common to all games. Presumably, he means that if one were to attempt to give an explanation for the concept of a game, one could not respond by saying that “A game necessarily has such-and-such

¹¹Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. Oxford, 1953, §497.

features" or "anything which has such-and-such features is a game." Now, it isn't at all obvious that a consideration of the concept 'game' fails to yield necessary conditions - some characteristic or characteristics common to all games. Games, it seems, must be rule-governed activities. Anything which is not an activity cannot be a game, and it is difficult to conceive of a game completely lacking in rules. Consider a child playing with blocks, but with no eye for building a stable structure. The child picks up pieces, stacks some, throws others, and puts others still in his mouth. Surely the child is playing, but is he playing a *game*? It is not clear that he is. Wittgenstein does not go to great lengths to defend this view of games, giving no explicit examples of a game which is not rule-governed. Perhaps he doesn't need to. It might suffice to say that games are not, in fact, identified as such in virtue of being rule-governed activities (for this seems to be a bit too vague of a criterion for most speakers), and that if pressed, a speaker will be unable to cite those features in virtue of which he makes his determinations.

Assuming that Wittgenstein is correct in his view about family-resemblance concepts, any attempt to establish necessary and sufficient conditions for such concepts would arbitrarily exclude certain instances from consideration that should be included in the concept's extension. What is being suggested is that the set of all games forms an imperfect community¹², a "complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail."¹³ The same, he thinks, can be said of language. One cannot give necessary and sufficient conditions for what counts as a linguistic activity. The various functions of language are too disparate and resist such an easy classification.

¹²To borrow a phrase from Nelson Goodman in *The Structure of Appearance*. 2nd ed., Cambridge, 1966.

¹³Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. Oxford, 1953, §66.

If the concept of a game has indeterminate boundaries, then it might seem that the term ‘game’ lacks a fixed meaning, and this lack is not the result of the superficial features of language, but rather, the result of indeterminacy in the rules governing the use of the term. When one uses the term ‘game’, one is not acting in accordance with a rule of the form “Apply the term ‘game’ to all and only those things which have such-and-such features necessarily.” Whatever the rule governing the use of the word ‘game’ looks like, it must reflect the indeterminate boundaries of the concept.

To press the point a bit further, consider a potential definition of the word ‘game’ as a rule-governed activity. If this definition were to be successful, then the rules governing the use of the word would seem to leave no room for ambiguity: the word ‘game’ should be applied to only those activities which are rule-governed. However, if Wittgenstein is correct, then no such definition can be given. The “complicated network of similarities” doesn’t admit of an analytic definition, and the rules governing usage must reflect this complexity.

Wittgenstein doesn’t think that the inability to give an analytic definition of the word ‘game’, nor the inability to give a list of rules strictly determining the correct use of the word, threatens one’s ability to understand the word. Neither is one’s ability to explain the meaning of the word threatened; a definition in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions is not required, rather, all one needs to do is to point out examples and say “*These* are games.” For family-resemblance concept-terms, ostensive definitions can serve to explain the use of the term. This is possible insofar as the members of a linguistic community agree in matters of classification and generalization. That a speaker is unable to specify the network of similarities that unites certain things under one concept does not impinge upon his ability to classify certain things that fall under that concept, for having been trained in the use of terms through example, and

participating in what Wittgenstein calls a “shared form of life” with the members of his community, he will follow the rules for the use of words “blindly”, without making a conscious decision to behave in this way rather than that.¹⁴

Wittgenstein doesn’t make clear exactly how prevalent he believes family-resemblance concepts to be. Due to the rather benign appearance of the concepts of language and game, one might think that many everyday concepts might turn out to lack any essential features, despite the fact that they have been given (or people have attempted to give them) analytic definitions in the past. If it turns out that many of the concepts taken to have fixed boundaries are, in fact, family-resemblance concepts, then many words will not admit of analytic definition.

Ostensive Definitions

While Wittgenstein doesn’t claim that there is any one form that the rules of word-usage must take, the inability to give analytic definitions for family-resemblance concept terms indicates that ostensive definitions can play an important role in teaching and explaining the use of words. By examining some of Wittgenstein’s comments on ostensive definitions, it should be possible to draw out his view on the nature of rules in general.

For those terms expressing family-resemblance concepts, pointing to examples can help establish correct usage of the term. As indicated in the last section, for this form of explanation to work, a certain degree of agreement amongst members of a linguistic community is required. For an individual who did not find our way of classifying things under the concept game natural, ostensive definitions would likely fail. This should not be too troubling, though, as any account of language presupposes a certain degree of agreement among speakers.

¹⁴Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. Oxford, 1953, §219.

An ostensive explanation need not be sufficient for explaining the use of only those words for which an analytic definition might be found wanting. In §28, Wittgenstein gives a partial list of the types of words for which an ostensive definition can be given: “a proper name, the name of a colour, the name of a material, a numeral, the name of a point of the compass, and so on.” Numerals, the names of materials, and the points of the compass don’t seem to resemble family-resemblance terms - their application requires certain specifiable necessary conditions. Nevertheless, it is Wittgenstein’s belief that not only can such terms be explained through ostension, but that explanations of this sort are in no way deficient or subordinate to more formal types of explanation. This view can be found in §28, just following the passage quoted above: “The definition of the number two, “That is called ‘two’” - pointing to two nuts - is perfectly exact.”

When one explains the use of a word, one gives a sentence (or a number of sentences) which is intended to show those circumstances in which it is correct to use the word. This sentence serves as a rule for the use of the word. An ostensive explanation is no different. In explaining the use of a word, say ‘game,’ by means of pointing to a number of examples and saying “*This* is a game,” one has expressed a rule for correct usage of the word.¹⁵ This is not to say that an ostensive definition is *the* form that the rules for word-usage take. The use of words for geometric shapes, mathematical operations, and the like - words which can be given strict definitions in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions - could be explained in alternative ways, and perhaps more traditional rules are necessary for closing up those gaps left in language

¹⁵Wittgenstein indicates at several points that an explanation of a word’s use serves as a rule for that word’s use. Cf. *The Blue Book*, p. 12 (an ostensive definition is a “rule of the usage of the word” and in §30 of the *Philosophical Investigations* (an ostensive definition “explains the use - the meaning - of a word....”).

by ostensive definitions. Yet in many cases, ostensive definitions serve perfectly well as rule for the use of words.

As Wittgenstein takes the concept of a rule to be a family-resemblance concept, it stands to reason that there is no one form that rules must have. Yet ostensive definitions can function as rules for word usage in a great number of cases, more than perhaps was traditionally thought, as indicated by Wittgenstein's claims that things such as numerals can be defined in this manner. As a matter of practice, ostensive explanations *are* often given for words, and it is conceivable that this may be the only explanation that a speaker has ever been given and the only one that he is in a position to give in response to a request.

It might be denied that an ostensive definition is capable of filling the role that Wittgenstein assigns to it. An ostensive definition, one might claim, leaves too much unspecified in that appealing to a finite number of samples in explaining a word's use doesn't provide a rule by which the correctness of a word's application in every conceivable instance can be judged. This worry can be read in at least two ways. In giving an ostensive explanation, only a finite number of samples can be appealed to. There may be an inclination to say that the rule so given specifies that the word properly applies to only those objects specifically referred to. This type of reaction would result from taking the statements used in the explanation (i.e. several statements of the form "*This is F*") to be *describing* the objects in question. If these statements were descriptive, then indeed, they would not be capable of playing a role in expressing a rule governing the use of the word in cases beyond those already mentioned. If one points to objects x_1, x_2, x_3 , and x_4 and says about each "*This is red*," as a way of describing some feature of each, this doesn't justify saying of object x_5 that it is red. This is because a description has no normative import; a true statement describing one object as being a certain way has no bearing

on the truth-value of a statement describing a second object as being that way - a descriptive statement of the form "*This* is red," when indicating a fire-truck, cannot establish the correctness of saying "*That* is red" when indicating any distinct object (the truth value of the second statement is established independently of the first). However, this is not what happens when one gives an ostensive definition. One is not describing some feature of an object, but rather establishing which type of thing it is correct to apply a word to.¹⁶ Ostensive definitions are used in such normative activities such as teaching and justifying, they should not be seen as merely describing certain entities as being a certain way, but as prescribing correct linguistic behavior. Against this claim it might be charged that an ostensive definition isn't the sort of thing that can accomplish such a task - that it is a category mistake to think of an ostensive definition as having a normative component. At best, an ostensive definition gives samples from which a rule governing the use of a word can be deduced, but the definition itself fails to function as a rule. Certainly, an ostensive definition does not have the form that is usually expected of a rule. If, however, the concept of a rule is a family-resemblance concept, then this is not too damning of a charge. Moreover, it would seem that, for Wittgenstein, developing rules is itself a language game. A rule is the type of thing that can be appealed to for justification as to why a word was used in a particular way, used to explain to a novice how a word is properly used, and to serve as an instrument of evaluation regarding particular instances. An ostensive definition can do any of these things, and thus seems to have a role in the game of giving rules for word-usage.

The second way of reading the above worry gains a bit more traction, but is, in Wittgenstein's view, based on a misconception about language, one that has already been

¹⁶Cf. Baker and Hacker, *Wittgenstein: Understanding and Meaning, Part I*. Oxford, 1980, p.89-90.

discussed, and one that Wittgenstein himself fell prey to in his early years. One may grant that an ostensive definition provides a standard of correctness in many cases (i.e., that it is not limited to those instances involved in the definition itself), but that it still leaves many possible cases unaccounted for. Think of Wittgenstein's example involving the disappearing chair from §80. A plausible ostensive definition for the word 'chair' would involve only those objects with a certain degree of temporal permanence. If a person came across a "chair" that repeatedly disappeared and reappeared, one might be at a loss to say whether or not the thing was properly called a chair. Normally, chairs don't behave in such a manner and none of those involved in the explanation of the word 'chair' did. So the rule that he had been operating according to in his use of the word didn't cover this contingency or many others. But can this be seen as a serious flaw in the rule? In everyday circumstances, the rule functions as it should, serving as a standard of correctness and guiding the behavior of speakers. Only in bizarre hypothetical circumstances do worries arise. So the rules that are available may not determine the correctness of using the term in every possible case, but they should not be seen as deficient as a result since they do determine correct uses in actual circumstances.

One who claimed that this indeterminacy was a flaw would be operating under a view of language whereby linguistic rules are akin to (or identical to) the rules of logic in that they rigidly determine what is and is not appropriate in every situation. Bob Hale, paraphrasing Wittgenstein, characterized the view as follows: "following a rule - a rule for the use of a word, say - is a matter of traveling along rails which are already laid down and determine its application in new cases...."¹⁷ It is against this view that Wittgenstein's comments on family-

¹⁷Bob Hale "Rule-Following, Objectivity, and Meaning," *A Companion to the Philosophy of Language*. Bob Hale and Crispin Wright, eds., Oxford, 1997, p.369.

resemblance concepts and proper names are directed. The fact that a concept like that of a game may have vague borders does not count against the usefulness of family-resemblance concepts. Similarly, the fact that the rules for word-usage which come in the form of ostensive definitions don't determine for every conceivable circumstance how the word is to be applied doesn't mean that such rules are useless, or even imperfect and serve only to stand proxy for some hidden, determinate rule.

The analogy between language and a game again proves useful in highlighting some common misconceptions about language. In §84, the reader is asked to imagine a game "that is everywhere bounded by rules." Even a very extensive set of deterministic rules could admit of some doubt, if one was willing to exert one's imagination. One could develop further rules (ones which governed the original set) that removed this doubt, but even the expanded set would conceivably admit of some further doubt, if one were inclined to press the issue. One could go on raising doubts for any set of rules, no matter how extensive and determinate, without end. So, in terms of there being conceivable situations for which the rules of word-usage do not apply, the problem of indeterminacy is not one restricted to language, or to the types of rules for word-usage (specifically, ostensive definitions). No game, nor any rule-governed activity, is immune to doubt in this sense - a sufficiently clever person could come up with a scenario not covered by the rules. This is not to say that every rule-governed activity is in some sense problematic. As Wittgenstein remarks in §84, just because someone could imagine a doubt that bypasses the rules does not mean that those who engage in the activity are in doubt. Just because one can imagine something having the appearance of a chair which blinks in and out of his vision, which the rules do not deal with, does not mean that normal people don't fully understand what "chair" means, or that the practice of calling things by this name is somehow defective. The rules that are available

for the use of the word ‘chair’ are perfectly satisfactory for those situations that do in fact commonly obtain.

Ostensive definitions admit of misinterpretation. For example, one might not know exactly what feature of an object is being indicated in the definition. This is considered in §28: a listener may witness an ostensive definition involving a gesture towards two nuts and the phrase “That is called ‘two’” and take ‘two’ to be the name of the particular pair of nuts being pointed to (rather than understand that what is being conveyed is that the number of the nuts is called ‘two’). The rule would have been misinterpreted, and the subsequent behavior of the listener would reflect this. Yet as was just discussed, the possibility of misinterpretation is not something unique to ostensive definitions - any rule can be misinterpreted. Yet this does raise an interesting point. In cases where a listener misinterprets a rule, a further rule is necessary to correct him. This could be done by pointing to more objects with the right feature (say being two of something) and saying while gesturing to each “*This* is called ‘two’, and *This* is called ‘two’, and *This* is called ‘two’” and so on. While as a practical matter this extending of the definition would likely suffice, it is certainly conceivable that a person could still misinterpret the rule given. In such a context, a definition might be required specifying exactly what feature it is to which the word is intended to apply. One might say “*This number* of things is called ‘two’.” This presupposes that the listener already has a grasp of the concept of a number - a presupposition that existed in the original definition given. For it is only if a person grasps the concept of number will the definition involving the phrase “*This* is called ‘two’” have the right impact. What this shows is that ostensive definitions - rules for word usage - do not stand alone. They require a prior understanding of different aspects of language. They do not provide an exit from the circle of words, that is, a direct nexus between language and the world.

Understanding

At the outset of this chapter, Wittgenstein's rejection of the characterization of meaning (by which meaning was taken to be a mental state) was discussed. The sections following §143 of the *Investigations* are dedicated to the rejection of this characterization of understanding. If one focuses on the performance of a student as the measure of understanding, it is clear that one is unable to say that, from a solitary performance which is in keeping with the dictates of the rule, the student understands the rule. His performance may only accidentally "match up" with the rule, and so a teacher would need to observe other performances before satisfying himself that the student understood. Yet it seems that no clear point can be established at which the student's performances can be said to constitute understanding (inviting a sorites paradox). This may incline a person to reject the link between understanding and performance, and instead adopt the view that understanding is a mental state, one that gives rise to the appropriate performances. This view has some intuitive force, as understanding often seems to happen all at once, like an awakening of sorts - the dawning of an intellectual grasp of some thing. This consideration does not seem to be compatible with the view that understanding is a matter of practice.

In response to this, Wittgenstein makes only the briefest of remarks. In §148/9, he asks whether understanding is the type of thing that comes and goes - whether one understands only when attending to a rule. Wittgenstein is pressing the idea that mental states have the characteristic of being limited in duration. This is obvious when one considers states such as pain and pleasure.¹⁸ If this suggestion is right, and furthermore, if understanding is a mental

¹⁸Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. Oxford, 1953, §149 notes (a) and (b).

state, then understanding is similar to having sensations of pain and pleasure. Intuitively, though, this is suspect. Understanding isn't necessarily the type of thing that, once had, is always had. Debilitating injuries can result in a person failing to understand something that they once did, and of course, there is forgetfulness. But these cases are notable for their effects, indicating that our notion of understanding is not of a transient mental state. It is assumed that a person understands rules, say those governing addition, even he is not consciously attending to them, whereas (and this is not without controversy) pain and pleasure are not taken to last beyond a person's consciousness of them. The denial of the stability of understanding would have the result that one "comes to understand" every time he is called upon to apply it, and this seems wrong.

As a way to salvage this view, one might posit the existence of unconscious mental states. This would grant some stability to understanding insofar as a person could be said to understand a rule even when not consciously attending to it, say while attending to something else, or while sleeping. Worries arise, however, when attempting to characterize these unconscious mental states. One option is an appeal to "a state of a mental apparatus (perhaps of the brain) by means of which we explain the *manifestations* of that knowledge."¹⁹ The mental apparatus might be cashed out in neurophysiological terms, and the state in question can be seen as one that causes the person to behave in a certain way. In the case of understanding a rule, the state would be the one which causes the person to act in accordance with the rule in the right circumstances. Another way of putting this would be to say that understanding a rule consists in being in a physical state which gives rise to a behavioral disposition.

¹⁹Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. Oxford, 1953, §149

Wittgenstein objects to calling the state of a mental apparatus *a* mental state, as there would be *two* separate criteria for it: the physical state itself, and the behavioral manifestations. Wittgenstein does not develop this criticism in any great detail. One can infer from this passage that he believes that a mental state should have but one criterion, though he does not explicitly say what this criterion is. If, however, this account under consideration is correct, then either the knowledge that a person has the appropriate physical state or the knowledge that a person behaves in such-and-such a way under certain circumstances would be sufficient for saying that he understands a given rule. In a parenthetical remark, Wittgenstein alludes to a further problem with this account, claiming that it makes the mistake of equating the distinction between conscious mental states and unconscious mental states with that between conscious mental states and dispositions (as the term is used in §149 indicating a dispositional “state” of the brain). Just what he has in mind is not abundantly clear, as no effort is made to specify either distinction, but something like the following seems to be a plausible interpretation. The distinction between conscious and unconscious mental states that Wittgenstein has in mind might be exemplified by the distinction between occurrent and non-occurrent beliefs. A non-occurrent belief does not present itself to the possessor, an occurrent belief does. However, being non-occurrent is not essential to the belief; it is possible for a person to actively consider a belief which did not previously present itself. A disposition (again, using the term as Wittgenstein uses it in §149) is a physical state that causes a person to act in such-and-such a way in response to certain stimuli. It is not the sort of thing that can present itself to a person (we can't be aware of the neurological states of our brain - at least, not directly). In this sense, an unconscious mental state is not identical with a disposition, and thus the distinction between conscious and unconscious states cannot be identical with that between conscious states and dispositions.

It is for these two reasons that Wittgenstein rejects the account of understanding as a mental state. The alternative offered is that understanding is akin to an ability. This avoids the problem of duration that faced the mental state account, for one possesses an ability even when one is not employing that ability. The questions raised at the beginning of this section remain, however. At what point do performances constitute understanding, and how, on this account, can the sensation of coming to understand something “in a flash” be explained?

To address the second problem first, one must examine what understanding “in a flash” amounts to. If a sequence of numbers is taken as an example, understanding in this way might consist in the grasping of the formula that governs the sequence. But might it not be said that someone could understand the sequence even if the formula never occurred to him? If questioned, a person might not be in a position to recite the formula by which their continuation of a sequence is governed - he might, instead, claim that continuing in the way that he does just “feels” right. Should the predication of understanding be withheld as a result, even if his performance never varies with respect to the sequence from that of a person who did recite the formula? Or, alternatively, might one be able to recite the formula, while continuing the sequence in an incorrect manner? In this latter case, the formula may occur to the person, but not as the result of proper algebraic thinking, and the formula would be of no use for continuing the series beyond the sample given. The upshot of these considerations is that, in the case mentioned, being able to produce a statement of the rule is neither necessary nor sufficient for understanding. Similar remarks can be made about the vague sensation that is commonly associated with understanding - one can have the sensation, and yet fail to understand (the sensation was premature, e.g.), and, presumably, one can understand without that sensation occurring. Take, for instance, the manipulation of dough by the apprentice baker. When he first

attempts to shape dough into a particular shape, the result is likely to be substandard. His baguettes will probably look like a snake that has swallowed an elephant. The person, at this early stage, understands that certain techniques are necessary for shaping baguettes, but he fails to understand entirely how a baguette is properly shaped. There are subtleties that he fails to grasp. After repetition, he will notice that his product comes out looking right. He may be inclined to say "Now I get it," but in truth, this claim comes after the fact. He will be unable to pinpoint any instant in which he progressed from not understanding to understanding, as it was a gradual change not accompanied by any sensation or belief.

The various phenomena that can be associated with understanding "in a flash" are neither necessary nor sufficient for understanding. This bolsters Wittgenstein's assertion that understanding is not a mental process. These phenomena may often accompany understanding, but are not essential to it. Looking back to the example of the bread-maker, it becomes apparent that, for Wittgenstein, understanding is not just a matter of being in some mental state. It is, rather, the mastery of a technique. A person might reflect on his (perhaps hypothetical) actions and have the sensation of understanding something all at once, but this sensation is not understanding, but a byproduct of it. The answer to the other question under consideration - the question of when a person can be said to understand - can be gleaned from these considerations. As understanding is a mastery of a technique, a person can be said to understand if he is capable of using the word in ways that accord with the established rules. If a student, instructed to develop a series of numbers by writing the next number but one, proceeds to write 1004 after 1000, then there has been a failure of understanding.

Rule-Following

This leads to the discussion of rule-following beginning in §185. Here, Wittgenstein harkens back to the game introduced in §143 wherein a student is instructed to continue a series of numbers according to a certain rule (the rule ‘+2’). It is conceivable that the pupil continues the series perfectly up until a given point, after which his performances would be judged as not in keeping with the rule given - for example, after 1000, he continues the series by writing ‘1004, 1008, 1012...’ When confronted with his mistake, the student contends that he has not deviated from the rule given, that he has proceeded in the same manner as before. For the student, proceeding as he did was in keeping with the rule as he understood it - writing ‘1004’ after ‘1000’ seemed correct because he did not take the rule to indicate that he should write the next number but one after each number. This misunderstanding is quite unusual given the rule in question; of this, Wittgenstein remarks: “Such a case would present similarities with one in which a person naturally reacted to the gesture of pointing with the hand by looking in the direction of the line from finger-tip to wrist, not from wrist to fingertip.”²⁰

This reinforces a point previously discussed, namely, that having a formula in one’s mind, so to speak, is not sufficient for understanding. In this situation, the student can give expression to the rule that he is supposed to be following, so it would seem that he is thinking of the rule, but his actions belie misunderstanding. The student has understood the rule ‘+2’ to mean that he is to add two to the previous number in the set up to 1000, and then to add four thereafter. This is not what was meant by the rule. Rather, what was meant was that the student should add two to every previous number in the set, so that regardless of the last number, the next will always be two greater.

²⁰Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. Oxford, 1953, §185.

That this is what was meant is not very controversial, and yet, if someone is asked what justifies writing '1002' after '1000' given the rule, and not '1004', he may have a difficult time giving an answer. That such a move is justified seems obvious, but the fact justifying it is elusive. It might be claimed that upon understanding the rule, one knew in advance which actions would be in accord with it, and so that in ordering the student to continue the series according to the rule '+2', the teacher meant for him to write '1002' after '1000'. This claim, taken in the most literal sense, cannot be true. One does not, upon understanding, actively consider every possible application of a rule. One might be drawn to this view by the fact that upon understanding a rule, a person is in a position to act in accordance with the rule without hesitation in novel situations. This is, of course, misguided. Everyone understands the rule '+2', but no one has thought of every step in a sequence governed by that rule - the set is infinite, and humans have only a finite capacity for thought. Perhaps one has actively thought of the transition from 1000 to 1002 according to the rule '+2', but some other example which has not been actively considered could be produced, and the conviction as to how one should act would remain. Moreover, an appeal such as this would be a reversion to the mental conception of meaning and understanding, which Wittgenstein has already rejected on independent grounds.

The notion of a rule involves the determination of correctness, but the elusiveness of the answer to the question of how they accomplish this might lead one to question whether rules *can* determine which actions are correct or incorrect. If a reason cannot be found to justify writing '1002' after '1000' when given the command to increase the series according to the rule '+2', then how can the student who writes '1004' be chastised? Some, most notably Saul Kripke, have taken Wittgenstein to presenting a skeptical paradox with regards rules and language precisely

on grounds of this sort. The next chapter is dedicated to exploring this interpretation of Wittgenstein's comments.

This brief survey reveals a number of notable things about Wittgenstein's views on language. The representationalism of the *Tractatus* is rejected in favor of a much more complex view of language. Also rejected is the "calculus" conception of the rules governing language: the rules of language are not necessary in the way that the rules of logic are, they do not govern in all conceivable cases, and they are the constructs of those who speak the language (i.e., they are not grounded in anything external to the language). Certain mental conceptions of meaning are dismissed as invoking "occult" properties in an attempt to avoid confronting serious difficulties; instead, Wittgenstein connects meaning with rule-governed use, suggesting that the meaning of a term is to be read off of the role of the term in the language. Similarly, certain mental conceptions of understanding are dismissed - understanding is not to be equated with the sensation that accompanies learning, nor with any other mental state; in place of these views, Wittgenstein claims that understanding is an ability, and attributions of understanding are to be restricted to those capable of correct behavior within the relevant domain.

The complexity of Wittgenstein's views should be quite apparent. It would be folly to think that one could grasp the principles of the *Investigations* by examining a few select passages in isolation. As we shall see in the next chapter, Saul Kripke does just this. With the resources at hand, it should be possible to show just where Kripke goes astray in his interpretation of Wittgenstein.

CHAPTER 3

KRIPKE'S WITTGENSTEIN AND THE *PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATIONS*

The focus of this chapter will be Kripke's interpretation of Wittgenstein's comments on rule-following. Kripke's book, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Language* has proven incredibly influential, even as many commentators express doubt about the accuracy of its portrayal of Wittgenstein's later thought. I hope that, as this chapter progresses, a clear picture will emerge of the differences between the discussion of rules in Wittgenstein's *Investigations* and Kripke's interpretation. Neither Kripke's skeptical paradox, nor his skeptical solution to that paradox, I contend, is properly attributable to Wittgenstein.

One might question the value of such an inquiry. After all, Kripke does write that the ideas presented in WRL should be thought of as "Wittgenstein's argument as it strikes Kripke,"¹ and in doing so, seems to shield himself from charges of inaccuracy in interpretation. To this it must be said that Kripke only once attempts to distance himself in such a way, and proceeds throughout the work as if he were offering a straightforward interpretation, and not merely a novel problem inspired by the writings of another. Furthermore, despite the dismissal by numerous thinkers of Kripke's interpretation, there are few serious attempts to justify this claim. Perhaps the fact that this justification would have to be largely exegetical in nature explains this: exegesis is typically seen as the work of historians, not those interested in fundamental questions about language. It seems to this writer, though, that this discussion is not without merit, for any light, however dim, that can be shed on the writings of Wittgenstein is a boon.

¹Saul Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Language*. Cambridge, 1982, p.5.

The Skeptical Paradox

The discussion of Kripke's interpretation of Wittgenstein was introduced in the introductory chapter of this thesis. Recall that a problem seemed to arise when seeking the justification for the claim that the student who continued the series according to the rule '+2' by writing "1000, 1004, 1008..." had made an error. Kripke takes this problem to be the basis of a skeptical paradox with regards to meaning and, more generally, rule-following.

Any action, it might seem, can be made to accord with a given rule if there is some way of stating the rule which makes the action out to conform with it. The student who continues the series as previously noted can be said to be acting in accordance with the rule '+2' insofar as he has interpreted the rule as follows: "add 2 to every number less than 1000, and add 4 to every number greater than or equal to 1000."² Yet if this is the case, then *any* continuation of the series can be said to accord with the rule, and any continuation can similarly be said to conflict with it. This would seem to undermine appeal to a rule as a standard of correctness - indeed, it seems to destroy the very possibility of the existence of rules. One does not need a fully-developed account of rules to have the conviction that a rule functions as an arbiter between correct and incorrect behavior. If it were to turn out that this was impossible, due to the inability to state coherently *how* a rule could set a standard of correctness by distinguishing, at least in most cases, which actions definitely were in accord with it and which actions definitely were not, then rules would have to be relegated to the realm of fiction.

Kripke highlights the problem in a slightly different way than Wittgenstein. Instead of asking what justifies the claim that the student has proceeded incorrectly, he constructs a thought

²This is only one possible interpretation of '+2' (out of infinitely many) that the student could be appealing to.

experiment that puts into doubt the conviction that one's current use of a word is in keeping with one's past use. Specifically, with regards to the term 'plus', he asks whether the answer '125' to the question "What is 68 plus 57?" is in keeping with the past usage of the term. By hypothesis, the subject has never performed addition on numbers greater than 57, and while his past usage is in consistent with his having meant addition, it is also consistent with his having meant the more complicated function of *quaddition*, whose definition is repeated here:

$$\begin{aligned} x \oplus y &= x + y, \text{ if } x, y < 57 \\ &= 5 \text{ otherwise.} \end{aligned}$$

As the subject's past usage of 'plus' and '+' conforms both with the supposition that he meant addition and with the supposition that he meant quaddition, what fact makes it the case that he meant one rather than the other? Kripke points out that no instructions that one has previously given oneself will suffice, for any such instruction can fall prey to the skeptic's doubt. Kripke considers the following candidate for instruction with regards the function in question: when faced with any equation of the form $x + y = ?$, one is to grab a handful of markers, and count out one pile equal to the value of x , and another equal to the value of y . The two piles are then combined and counted, the result being the value sought. Yet the skeptic can call into question the term 'count'. Perhaps when one gave himself such instructions, one was using the term 'count' to mean *quount*, an activity whereby one performs the action associated with counting if one is joining two heaps that are individually less than 57, but whereby one answers '5' if either heap is 57 or more. If one indeed was using 'count' in this manner, then the instructions that he gave himself for 'plus' would dictate that he now answer '5'. Any instructions that one could cite grounding 'count' as meaning *count* would fall prey to similar worries.

The challenge, then, is this: can any fact be produced that makes it the case that the claim that the present usage of ‘plus’ (whereby the correct answer to the question ‘What is 68 plus 57?’ is 125) conforms to past usage (whereby the correct answer is 5)? The considerations of the preceding paragraph, motivated by Wittgenstein’s comments³ on rule following, attempt to show that as any rule can be variously interpreted, and that as no interpretation is in any sense privileged, nothing in a subject’s mental history fixes what one meant. Wittgenstein illustrated how understanding did not bestow upon a subject knowledge of how to act according to the rule understood in every possible circumstance, and the rule that the subject might be in a position to cite as the one he is following is subject to many different interpretations, each, according to the skeptic, with no better claim than any other to be the “correct” one. So nothing mental seems to solve the problem.

Of course, there may be other options. Perhaps non-mental facts about a person can determine what that person means in a given situation. The dispositionalists in particular will argue something like this. Kripke rejects a dispositional account, and with good reason. This issue will be investigated in some detail in the next chapter. For now, it is enough to note that the only facts that Kripke thinks are even candidates for fixing meaning are mental and behavioral, and neither, he feels, foot the bill.

Having set out in sufficient detail the challenge of the skeptic, Kripke makes some remarks about the scope of the skeptical paradox:

Given, however, that everything in my mental history is compatible with the conclusion that I meant plus and with the conclusion that I meant quus, it is clear that the sceptical challenge is not really an epistemological one. It purports to show that nothing in my mental history of past behavior - not even what an

³Cf. *Philosophical Investigations*, §84-86, §185, and §201.

omniscient God would know - could establish whether I meant plus or quus.⁴

According to Kripke, if the skeptic is successful in showing that there is no fact that establishes that a subject meant one thing rather than another, then the conclusion to be drawn is not epistemological. That is, it isn't a matter of not knowing what a subject meant by his use of a term as a result of not being able to discover a meaning-fixing fact (which may exist, but do so beyond our ken). Instead, it is Kripke's contention that the inability to find such facts is a result of the absence of any potential candidates (such as instructions that a subject gives himself) to justify a claim about what a subject means. This being the case, there simply are no meaning-fixing facts. Notice how strange the label skeptic appears in this light: Kripke's interlocutor isn't merely claiming that meaning facts are something that cannot be known - rather, he claims that such facts have no place in metaphysical space. Furthermore, the so-called skeptic takes this nihilism about meaning-fixing facts to entail nihilism about meaning in general - without these facts, there is no such thing as meaning anything by any word. Once his cards are on the table, it is clear that he is no skeptic at all. Though the so-called skeptic initiates the discussion by questioning the possibility of a certain kind of knowledge, he eventually abandons skepticism for a position that has metaphysical as well as epistemological implications. This position, moreover, is on much shakier ground than skepticism. The conclusions that there is no such thing as meaning and, thereby, that language is impossible, cannot be cogently argued for as they would render any premises that might be brought to bear unjustified. While arguments for skepticism have been given that suffer from the same problem (for example, the argument from deceptive senses that is advanced in *Meditations II*), it is generally granted that some skeptical

⁴Saul Kripke, *Witgenstein on Rules and Private Language*. Cambridge, 1982, p. 21.

arguments exist that do not. No such argument, it seems, could be given for the claim that language is impossible. Kripke attempts to overcome this problem by insisting that the so-called skeptic is only raising concerns about a person's past usage of a term, the idea being that there are no worries about the language being used to establish the problem. This won't work, as the scope of the conclusion is not limited to language in the past. The label skeptic, then, is not properly used with respect to Kripke's gadfly. This, though, is a minor observation, and is tangential to the purposes of this chapter. Kripke never intended the his interlocutor to be presenting a tenable thesis about language, in any event, as he ultimately attempts to show how language is possible without the existence of meaning-facts.

Problems with the Skeptical Paradox Interpretation

In a discussion of Kripke's interpretation of Wittgenstein, there are few better places to start than at *Investigations* §201, for it is this passage which Kripke identifies as central to the project of the *Investigations*. Kripke quotes the first paragraph of this section at the beginning of his chapter on the "Wittgensteinian Paradox".

This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because any course of action can be made out to accord with the rule. The answer was: if *any* action can be made out to accord with the rule, then it can also be made out to conflict with it. And so there would be neither accord nor conflict here.⁵

One can see the origins of Kripke's skeptic in this passage, to be sure. What is interesting, though, is that despite the importance Kripke places on this section, he does not give any attention to the next paragraph, which reads as follows:

It can be seen that there is a misunderstanding here from the mere fact that in the course of our argument we give one interpretation after another; as if each contented us at least for a moment, until

⁵Ibid., p.7.

we thought of yet another standing behind it. What this shews is that there is a way of grasping a rule which is *not* an *interpretation*, but which is exhibited in what we call “obeying the rule” and “going against it” in actual cases.

Hence there is an inclination to say: any action according to the rule is an interpretation. But we ought to restrict the term “interpretation” to the substitution of one expression of the rule for another.

Contrary to Kripke’s claim that the skeptical paradox is the central issue of the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein appears to dismiss it immediately. The paradox is based on a misunderstanding of the nature of rules and rule-following, a misunderstanding which Wittgenstein is attempting to illuminate. Think back, once again, to the student from §185. When confronted with the student’s actions in continuing the series ‘+2’, one is inclined to say that the student has misunderstood the rule. Instead of understanding it to mean “write the next but one after every number in the series”, he has taken it to mean something like “add 2 to every number up to 1000, and add 4 thereafter”. Both of these alternatives constitute interpretations (or, in the case of the latter, a misinterpretation) of the rule ‘+2’; they are different expressions of the rule. The possibility of many different interpretations, and the seeming lack of a justification for giving any particular interpretation priority, leads to the worries about rule-following, as we have seen. But not only does Wittgenstein deny the conclusion that rule-following is impossible, he denies the conception of rule-following which led to this problem. What Wittgenstein rejects is the idea that understanding a rule is simply a matter of interpreting it correctly - that is, of being able to give the correct alternative expression of the rule.

During the discussion of ostensive definitions in the last chapter, the role that rules play in the language-game was briefly touched upon. It was said that rules are used to explain and justify behavior and to instruct novices about the proper moves to make within the confines of

the game in question. When a person engages in any of these activities, he is playing a game for which there are rules. One cannot, of course, simply cite some rule - one has to cite a rule that agrees with his actions, for otherwise, his attempts to explain or justify behavior would fail. It is in this agreement that the meaning of a rule is to be found. To determine the meaning of a word, Wittgenstein claims that one must examine the way that the word is used - what behavior is associated with it. So too with rules. If one examines the behavior associated with the citation of a rule, one can determine the actions which count as being in accord with the rule. It is not an interpretation of a rule that determines what accords with the rule, but rather, the way that the rule is used - the behavior associated with it, that does this. Thus, Wittgenstein writes in §198: "any interpretation still hangs in the air along with what it interprets, and cannot give it any support. Interpretations by themselves do not determine meaning."

As mentioned earlier, one of Kripke's theses regarding the *Investigations* is the claim that the skeptical paradox is among the central issues of the work. The text does not strongly support this claim. Wittgenstein does not appear to be advancing a form of skepticism or nihilism as a thesis which seriously threatens rule-following and language. Instead, he is concerned with a particular conception of rule-following whereby the connection between a rule and those actions which accord with it is made by the interpretation given to the rule by a subject. Just as he rejected mentalistic pictures of meaning and understanding, so to does Wittgenstein reject this mentalistic picture of rule-following. Having in one's mind a particular formulation of a rule (that is, a sentence expressing the rule) does not settle once and for all how the rule guides actions, for any interpretation is subject to further interpretation. Such a conception leads to absurdity in that it strips rules of their normative character, since it seems to entail that any act can be made to accord with a rule. So, this conception must be rejected, and in its place

Wittgenstein offers the picture mentioned above: the connection between a rule and those actions which accord with it is established by custom - the regular association of the rule with certain behavior. Understanding a rule is a matter of being able to make this association in practice. It is this which is the focus of §198-§201.

Kripke's attribution of a non-factualism with respect to meaning to Wittgenstein merits consideration. On the one hand, Wittgenstein would almost certainly agree with the claim that no facts about a subject's mental history could establish what was meant in a given instance. This would seem to follow from Wittgenstein's rejection of mentalistic conceptions of meaning, understanding, and rule-following. On the other, looking at some of Wittgenstein's middle-period works, especially *Philosophical Grammar*, it appears that he did accept at least a limited form of factualism:

"The proposition determines in advance what will make it true."
Certainly, the proposition "p" determines that p must be the case in order to make it true; and that means:
(the proposition p) = (the proposition that the fact p makes true).
...Like everything metaphysical the harmony between thought and reality is to be found in the grammar of the language.⁶

But is Kripke claiming that Wittgenstein came to deny this by the time he came to write the *Investigations*? Perhaps not. When characterizing Wittgenstein's non-factualism, Kripke appeals to a quote by Michael Dummett: "the Investigations contains implicitly a rejection of the classical (realist) Frege-*Tractatus* view that the general form of explanation of meaning is a statement of the truth conditions."⁷ This is not as sweeping a claim as one attributing a general non-factualism, and if this is all that Kripke is up to, then there is some truth here. Wittgenstein

⁶Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Grammar*. Oxford, 1974, p.161-2.

⁷Michael Dummett, *Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Mathematics*. p.348, as quoted in Saul Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, Cambridge, 1982 p.73.

would likely deny that there is *any* general form that an explanation of meaning *must* take. However, it appears that Kripke is after bigger fish, for he claims that Wittgenstein seeks to overthrow the view that all meaning can be explained in terms of truth conditions and replace it with an “assertion conditional” theory. Again, there may be some truth to the claim that Wittgenstein rejects a truth-conditional theory of meaning. If what is meant is that Wittgenstein rejects the view that “a declarative sentence gets its meaning by virtue of its *truth conditions*, by virtue of its correspondence to facts that must obtain if it is true,” then this seems right. The meaning of a declarative sentence comes from the way that the sentence is used - from the role that it plays in the language games in which it figures. But whether he intends to replace truth-conditional semantics with a theory about assertion conditions is another matter entirely.

Before moving on to this topic, though, it should be asked whether Wittgenstein would have agreed with Kripke’s claim that there are no facts about behavior which can establish what a speaker meant. As Wittgenstein characterized rule-following as a practice or an activity, and meaning as connected with use, it would seem as if facts about a person’s behavior *could*, in his view, establish what a speaker meant. Granted, these facts would not be free from normative terms, as some of the behavior involved has normative import (that is, the facts being considered would have to take into account the practices of teaching, explaining, and so on). But there is nothing obvious in Wittgenstein’s writings which explicitly rules out such facts, and their normative character need not disqualify them from consideration as answers to the skeptic.

The Skeptical Solution

“There can be no such thing as meaning anything by any word. Each new application we make is a leap in the dark; any present intention could be interpreted so as to accord with

anything we may choose to do. So there can be neither accord, nor conflict.”⁸ Thus Kripke begins the third chapter of his book, in which he outlines what he sees as Wittgenstein’s “skeptical solution” to the skeptical paradox. The notion of a skeptical solution to a skeptical problem comes from Hume’s *Enquiry*⁹ Hume famously finds himself faced with a skeptical problem concerning inductive reasoning, namely, that inductive inferences can be justified neither *a priori*, nor *a posteriori*. Briefly, induction cannot be justified *a priori* since the denial of the conclusion of any inductive argument is conceivable while granting the truth of the premises. To attempt to justify induction through empirical methods begs the question.¹⁰ Thus, the skeptic about induction claims that *no* inductive inferences are *ever* justified. Hume does not deny these points. He does, however, deny that such considerations will “undermine the reasonings of common life and carry its doubts so far as to destroy all action as well as speculation.”¹¹ That is, though those beliefs arrived at through induction cannot be rationally justified, the skeptical considerations are incapable of affecting them. Humans are by nature compelled to make these inferences, and so while a skepticism about induction is justified, this skepticism will not have any effect on practical judgements. Beliefs that are arrived at through induction may not, according to Hume, be justified, but the compulsion to make these judgements is stronger than the skepticism which would advocate a rejection of them.

⁸Saul Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*. Cambridge, 1982 , p.55.

⁹Cf. David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. Indianapolis, 1993, Section V.

¹⁰One would be, in effect, attempting to justify the principle that one can extrapolate from observed regularities to unobserved regularities by appeal to observed cases where such extrapolation proved to be correct.

¹¹ David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. Indianapolis, 1993, Section V, Part I SBN p.41.

Kripke interprets Wittgenstein as taking a somewhat similar approach to the aforementioned considerations against meaning. Rather than attempt to refute the claims of the “skeptic” regarding the non-existence of meaning-fixing facts, Kripke’s Wittgenstein agrees, but with a caveat: “Nevertheless, our ordinary practice or belief is justified because - contrary appearances notwithstanding - it need not require the justification the sceptic has shown to be untenable.”¹²In other words, Kripke’s Wittgenstein accepts the “skeptic’s” premise that there are no meaning-fixing facts, but denies that this entails the impossibility of meaning. Claims of the sort “S meant *m* by ‘w’” are not justified by some fact about the world, but rather by *assertability conditions*. It should be noted, though, that there is a difference between Hume’s strategy and that being attributed to Wittgenstein. Hume concluded that inductive inferences are *not* justified, but that this fact was incapable of ending the practice of making such inferences, as this practice is by nature compelled. Kripke’s Wittgenstein, on the other hand, claims that while meaning-claims cannot be established by appeal to facts, that there are conditions under which their assertion is *warranted*. Hume never claims that inductive inferences are warranted, or that some other watered-down normative predicate can be applied to them, but rather that people are going to continue making them despite the fact that they cannot be justified.

Kripke initially offers a rather weak description of these conditions as “roughly specifiable circumstances under which [assertions] are legitimately assertable,”¹³ though he goes on the flesh it out somewhat, albeit in a way that, at first glance, makes the skeptical solution seem implausible:

¹²Saul Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*. Cambridge, 1982, p.66.

¹³Ibid., p.78.

It is part of our language game of speaking of rules that a speaker may, without ultimately giving any justification, follow his own confident inclination that this way (say, responding '125') is the *right* way to respond, rather than another way (e.g. responding '5'). That is, the 'assertability conditions' that license an individual to say that, on a given occasion, he ought to follow his rule this way rather than that are, ultimately, that he does what he is inclined to do.¹⁴

This should give the reader pause. Kripke appears to be saying that a person is entitled to claim that his way of behaving accords with a certain rule if he behaves in the manner that he is inclined to. So, a person who is inclined to give the answer '125' to the question "What is $57+68$ ", and subsequently does so, can claim that he meant addition by '+' (or, perhaps more accurately, can claim that he understood '+' to mean addition) and, given that, can claim that his answer is correct. This would seem to have the consequence that *any* answer to this question would be correct, if it stemmed from the inclinations of the subject. If the person was inclined to give the answer '5', then it would be claimed that his use of '+' accorded with its meaning quaddition, and that his answer accorded with this rule. Yet meaning has a normative component, and this view saps it of this. If a person were to write down '5' in response to the question "What is $57+68$ ", the response would not be that the student performed correctly based upon some interpretation, or that the student's actions were in line with '+' denoting *quaddition*. Rather, the student would be chastised for making a mistake, for not understanding the rule given. Something more must be said on the matter. To this Kripke appeals to Wittgenstein's brief comments on private language, and adds the condition that the answer given must be subject to correction by other members of the community:

Jones is entitled, subject to correction by others, provisionally to say, "I mean addition by 'plus'," whenever he has the feeling of

¹⁴Ibid., p.88.

confidence - “now I can go on!” - that he can give the ‘correct’ responses in new cases; and *he* is entitled, again provisionally and subject to correction by others, to judge a new response to be ‘correct’ simply because it is the response he is inclined to give.¹⁵

This account places agreement amongst members of a community at the core of meaning.

Of course, agreement of this sort is required for communication. Wittgenstein writes in §240:

“Disputes do not break out... over the question whether a rule has been obeyed or not... That is part of the framework on which the working of our language is based (for example, in giving descriptions).” For Wittgenstein, agreement amongst members of a community is a prerequisite for communication. There is reason to think that he does not think that it plays the central role assigned to it by Kripke.

Problems with the Skeptical Solution Interpretation

There are some worries about the skeptical solution apart from those arising from the inappropriateness of the skeptical paradox interpretation. There is little explicit textual evidence to support the claim that Wittgenstein is advocating replacing truth conditions with assertability conditions. To begin with, nowhere does Wittgenstein suggest that an individual is *licensed* to act, with respect to a rule, in one way rather than another, because he is inclined to do so. In fact, he seems to say the exact opposite when he remarks that “to *think* one is obeying a rule is not to obey a rule.”¹⁶ Of course, this comment precedes a prohibition on private rule following, which Kripke appeals to in an attempt to salvage this view, but whatever merits it may have on its own¹⁷ it is not supported by Wittgenstein’s text.

¹⁵Ibid., p.90.

¹⁶Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. Oxford, 1953, §202.

¹⁷See the following chapter.

The communal aspect of Kripke's assertability conditions arises from a misinterpretation of Wittgenstein's comments on private languages. Kripke views §202 as stating the conclusion of an argument to the effect that private languages are impossible. Wittgenstein doesn't go out of his way to make clear just what he means when he speaks of "private" rule-following, but it is clear that Kripke takes him to be speaking of isolation from a community of speakers (not necessarily a physical isolation, though this is the form such isolation will usually take). Kripke's assertability conditions require the presence of a community, making rule-following a fundamentally social practice. But the passages preceding §202 indicate that Wittgenstein is up to something different. Understanding a rule, and acting in accordance with it, is a practice. That is, rule-governed activity exists only insofar as there is a certain regularity between certain performances and the citation of rules. When Wittgenstein writes in §199 that "It is not possible that there should have been only one occasion on which only one person obeyed a rule," he is making a rather simple comment on the nature of rule following: that as a practice, rule-following requires a history of regularity in behavior. The key portion of this passage is the restriction against singular occurrences, not a restriction against people in isolation.

Perhaps Kripke hasn't been done justice here. After all, he does write that it does not follow from the private language argument (as he sees it) that "Robinson Crusoe, isolated on an island, cannot be said to follow any rules...."¹⁸ Yet his strategy for allowing for this is a bit odd. The assertability conditions that he attributes to Wittgenstein require communal agreement as the standard of correctness. If this is right, then an individual who lacks a community will have no such standard, and without this standard, cannot be said to follow rules. Intuitively, though, this seems incorrect. A castaway doesn't lose his ability to speak in his native tongue simply

¹⁸Saul Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*. Cambridge, 1982, p.110.

because there are none of his countrymen around to correct him. Kripke's solution to this problem is to claim that such an individual *can* be said to follow rules, but only insofar as he is adopted into a community by those considering him. Being adopted into a community amounts to being judged by the criteria for rule-following held by the community in question. The criteria for rule-following, for Kripke, are assertability conditions, at the core of which is communal agreement. As Kripke wishes to say that Crusoe can be said to speak a language, he must be thinking that the community doing the judging is the community with which Crusoe's behavior must agree. Indeed, in a footnote, Kripke characterizes this adoption as attributing the rules of the community to the individual being evaluated. So Crusoe, when considered by English-speakers, is subject to correction by a community, though indirectly. His behavior *can* be judged as conforming to or violating the rules of the community. However, when Crusoe is "*considered in isolation*," none of this is the case. Without the judgement of a community, be it ever so distant, Crusoe cannot be said to follow rules and, therefore, cannot be said to speak a language. This seems to have the effect that *actual* communal assent is not necessary. The fact that Crusoe's behavior matches up with that of a distant community in such a way as to allow for the community to judge him would be enough to justify the claim that he speaks English.

This view, though, leads to further problems. Consider two men living in isolation on two remote islands. Assume that these men have never been taught to speak any language. Now assume further that over the course of their lives, the men have developed strange behavioral traits. The behavior of one of these men is such that, were he to be observed by an English-speaking person, he would be judged to be speaking English to himself. Not only would one judge that he seems to be speaking English to himself, but his behavior is so sophisticated that were he to encounter an Englishman, the two would apparently be able to strike up a

conversation, though one limited by certain terms that are unshared due to the differences in their surroundings (the man on the island, presumably, would not be able to talk about cars and computers).

Since the islander's behavior matches up with some distant community, he can be said to speak English. The behavior of the other man also involves vocalizations, but does not correspond to any known language. His behavior, let's assume, is equally as sophisticated as the man who seems to speak English. If the above view is right, then for this reason alone, the man cannot be said to speak a language or follow rules. This doesn't seem right, though. That the one can be said to speak a language, and the other not, seems to be the result of an accident. It is conceivable that the second man does do all of these things, but that the rules he follows are different from those followed by any other community of speakers. That this is so is a reason for rejecting the view that agreement with others is a necessary condition of rule-following.

There is textual evidence that indicates Wittgenstein did not see his comments on private languages as prohibiting the development of languages by those in isolation. In *Investigations* §243, which prior to Kripke was seen as the initial passage of the private-language argument, Wittgenstein writes:

We could even imagine human beings who spoke only in monologue; who accompanies their activities by talking to themselves. - An explorer who watched them and listened to their talk might succeed in translating their language into ours.

The situation described here makes no appeal to communal assent. The speakers in question should not be viewed as engaged in corrective, educative, or any other sort of normative behavior amongst one another (their languages need not even be similar), and it is clear that the explorer is not simply adopting them into his own community. Certainly, to be successful in

translating their language into his own, he must presuppose certain basic things about them,¹⁹ but this cannot be all that Kripke has in mind, for in the Crusoe scenario, it was essential that Crusoe be considered as a full-fledged member of the linguistic community doing the judging. The explorer doesn't need to consider the speakers he observes as members of his community in order to say of them that they follow rules and speak languages - all he needs to do is watch and listen for telltale behavioral signs.

Concluding Remarks

Kripke is correct in claiming that Wittgenstein denies the existence of facts about a speaker's mental history which could establish what a speaker meant by a particular sign on a given occasion. As Wittgenstein asserts that meaning, understanding, and rule-following are not mental phenomena, it follows that he would reject the claim that facts about the mind could establish what one means, whether one understands, and whether one is following a rule. Yet Kripke goes further and takes these comments as aimed at establishing a general skepticism about the possibility of rule-following and language. However, Wittgenstein's goal in the *Investigations* is to clear up misconceptions that have led to seemingly intractable problems in philosophy, and his comments around §201 should be read in this light. Wittgenstein makes clear that the "paradox" surrounding rule-following is not something to be taken seriously, and results from an unsatisfactory conception of rule-following. Kripke's interpretation does not appreciate this fact.

¹⁹Cf. *Investigations* §185. The type of things to be presupposed would be akin to the natural reaction to pointing, which is to look in the direction of wrist-to-fingertip. We assume that our counterpart does not differ from us (to any great extent) with respect to things such as the way in which he finds it natural to classify things, or the way he responds to natural indicators.

As stated above, central to the skeptical solution that Kripke ascribes to Wittgenstein is the view of language and rule-following as essentially social or communal activities. This view arises from a misreading of Wittgenstein's comments on private languages. Wittgenstein was not claiming in §199-§202 that rule-following does not make sense except in a social setting; rather, he was making the point that as a practice, rule-following requires a regularity in behavior, and as such, a rule cannot be followed only once (for no regularity could be established), and cannot be such that only one person could, in principle, follow it (for the behavioral aspect of rule-following is, in principle, able to be replicated by others).

Finally, aside from the problems with Kripke's characterization of assertability conditions, the claim that Wittgenstein was seeking to replace truth-conditional semantics with talk of assertability conditions doesn't seem to respect the complexity of the view that he was putting forth. Baker and Hacker sum up this criticism best:

Forcing Wittgenstein into the invented position of constructivism, intuitionist semantics, assertion-conditions theories, is altogether misguided. It is a mistake stemming from a hankering after sweeping generalizations, global confrontations of semantic theories, and large-scale theory-building. But Wittgenstein builds no such theories. He does not contend that a language is a monolithic structure run through with truth-conditions *or* assertion conditions which give meanings to sentences and words. It is not a calculus of rules, either in the form of classical logic or in the form of intuitionist logic. It is a motley of language-games, an endlessly variegated form of human activity, interwoven with our lives at every level.²⁰

²⁰ G.P. Baker and P.M.S. Hacker, *Scepticism, Rules and Language*. Oxford, 1984, p.49.

CHAPTER 4

SOLUTIONS TO KRIPKE'S SKEPTICAL PARADOX: NON-FACTUALISM, REDUCTIONISM, AND NON-REDUCTIONISM

In this chapter, I examine several of the more common replies to the skeptic's challenge about meaning-facts. For the sake of continuity between the previous chapter and the current one, the first reply that will be discussed will be Kripke's skeptical response. While doubts were raised in the last chapter about the appropriateness of attributing this view to Wittgenstein, little was said about the merits of this view itself. At issue here will be Kripke's non-factualism and the communal aspect of his assertability conditions. At the end of this discussion, reasons for rejecting this solution should emerge.

Following the discussion of the skeptical solution, traditional direct solutions to the skeptical challenge will be examined. A straight solution to the skeptic consists in the offering of a particular type of fact which is supposed to be capable of establishing what a speaker means on a given occasion. The most common direct responses are variations on the dispositionalist account. Kripke offers some very compelling reasons for rejecting dispositionalism, but the view has proven tenacious. While one cannot reasonably hope to, in the course of one essay, put to rest once and for all any philosophical theory, it can be hoped that clear reasons can be given for thinking that a particular line of inquiry is troubling enough to warrant setting it aside while more fruitful avenues are explored. The dispositionalist account seems to have much against it, and hopefully this will become evident in this chapter.

The dispositionalist attempts to answer the skeptic on the skeptic's terms. Having rejected the appeal to instructions, the skeptic asks for facts which are *naturalistic*, that is, facts which can be given in behavioral terms. It is the unavailability of any suitable naturalistic facts that

prompts Kripke to develop his skeptical solution. It is far from clear, though, that the restriction to naturalistic facts is well motivated. This chapter, and this thesis, will end with a discussion of whether *non-naturalistic* facts might be suitable as a direct response to Kripke's skeptic. Such a strategy would not be playing by the skeptic's rules, and might not, in the end, bear fruit, but the possibility will be explored.

Kripke's Skeptical Solution, Revisited

Kripke's non-factualism with respect to meaning results in the view that sentences of the form “S meant *m* by ‘w’” are not true in virtue of some fact. Instead, claims about what a speaker meant are justified by reference to the appropriate conditions of assertion, which themselves make reference to the assent of a community of speakers. There is reason to think, though, that Kripke's non-factualism doesn't merely extend to sentences attributing meaning. Wright, in his essay “Kripke's Account of the Argument Against Private Language” and Boghossian, in his essay “The Rule-Following Considerations,” think that Kripke is committed to a “global” non-factualism, or a rejection of facts *simpliciter*. The reasoning behind this claim is as follows: the truth-value of a sentence is determined by the meaning of the sentence and the relevant state-of-affairs; if there is no fact of the matter with respect to the meaning of a sentence, then there is no fact of the matter with respect to the truth-value of that sentence.¹ This has the uncomfortable result that the truth-value of *any* sentence, not just ascriptions of meaning, is in part determined by the conditions of warranted assertion, and not by facts alone. This includes the truth-value of sentences expressing logical truths (“ $P \vee \neg P$ ”), sentences expressing mathematical equations (“ $2+3=5$ ”), and the sentence expressing the thesis of global non-factualism itself. This is a

¹Cf. Crispin Wright, “Kripke's Account of the Argument Against Private Language” *The Journal of Philosophy* vol. 81 no. 12, December 1984, p.769.

striking and somewhat extreme result, and one may be tempted to think that there *must* be something wrong with this view. The problem here may be more felt than actual, though, a shock at the scope of the view. If there *is* any incoherence here, it is not obvious. The proponent of global non-factualism can claim that when one talks of truth, one is really speaking of warranted assertion, and this extends to the thesis of global non-factualism. Any worries that one might have in this regard stems from continuing to think of truth in purely factual terms.

Perhaps there are reasons for accepting such a view. Kripke, though, seems forced into accepting this view by his skeptical solution; if it can be shown that the skeptical solution has other problems, then global non-factualism will have to be recommended on independent grounds. As it stands, there are further worries about the skeptical solution, ones which stem from the communitarian aspect of the assertability conditions.

According to Kripke, following a rule does not make sense outside of a community of practitioners. One can only be said to act according to a rule given that he is inclined to behave in such and such a way with respect to a given rule and that his community, by and large, would assent to the correctness of his behavior. Agreement with a community, then, is the mark of correctness. There can be no such thing as a community as a whole (or at least, a majority of the community) acting incorrectly with respect to a given rule.

This should raise some eyebrows. Intuitively, a community *can* get things wrong and misapply rules. In many contemporary English-speaking areas, the word ‘literally’ is used by many members of the community to mean something akin to ‘figuratively’. The phrases “It is *literally* raining cats and dogs out here”, “I am *literally* freezing to death”, “He *literally* knocked the hell out of that guy” should not seem too foreign; these, or similar phrases, are bandied about frequently in everyday use, and not just by the so-called uneducated masses. Now, it might not

be the case that such uses are the most common, but it would not take any great effort of imagination to think that such *could* be the case. Now, if such were the case, and assuming that the history of the English language remained largely unchanged (with the exception that the use of the word ‘literally’ as synonymous with ‘figuratively’ had become more prevalent in recent years than in fact), would it be appropriate to say that using ‘literally’ synonymously with ‘figuratively’ was correct? It can be granted that in this situation, using the word ‘literally’ in this way would be effective in communication, but this is quite a different matter from whether the use is correct. The right response, it seems, is to say that the community (or at least the majority of the community) is using the word incorrectly, despite the fact that most of the members would agree that so using the word is correct. If Kripke is right, though, it wouldn’t make sense to say that the community was using the word incorrectly. The only case, by the lights of this account, in which it makes sense to say that someone is using a word incorrectly is one in which a member of a community uses a word in a way that does not agree with the way that most of the other members use it.

The account cannot be modified to respect this intuition by invoking a privileged subset of the community with which agreement in behavior will serve as a standard of correctness. For in claiming that this subset is somehow privileged, it is tacitly being claimed that the members of the subset use words correctly. This presupposes a standard of correctness that does not appeal to communal agreement, contrary to the initial claim.

If the considerations from the previous chapter about private languages are correct, then there is further reason to reject the idea that agreement with a community determines which actions are in accordance with a rule. It was suggested that the proper reading of Wittgenstein’s comments on private language does not preclude isolated individuals from using language. Even

if Wittgenstein *had* been claiming that physically isolated individuals couldn't use a language, there would be little reason to think that this is so. Surely Robinson Crusoe didn't lose the ability to speak English upon being shipwrecked! Kripke appreciates this, and tries to make an allowance for cases like that of Crusoe. His provision for this allowance, though, seems implausible. Crusoe speaks English regardless of whether he is being considered as a member of some broader English-speaking community. Moreover, it seems possible that an isolated individual could develop a novel language, so that there would be no community to consider him a member of. Kripke's allowance for Crusoe, as interpreted in the previous chapter, doesn't extend to cases like this, nor can it, for to allow cases like this would be to deny the central claim of Kripke's account: that rule-following (and language) is essentially a social activity. Nevertheless, the apparent conceivability of an isolated user of language speaks strongly for the view that rule-following behavior does not require a community.

Finally, there is the question of whether Kripke has solved the skeptical problem at all. The problem arose initially due to an inability to establish whether a speaker meant addition or quaddition by 'plus'. Kripke's solution is to deny that there are any facts which establish this, and claim rather that there are instead conditions of warranted assertion. Communal agreement is supposed to play a large role here, allowing for the warranted assertion of claims such as "S meant addition by 'plus'." Just how this is supposed to work, though, is unclear. That a community agrees on the answer to the question "What is 68 plus 57?" might make it the case that no member would disagree with the answer given by one of his peers, but does it warrant the claim that any member means addition by 'plus' rather than another function? Consider what Kripke says on the matter of third-person ascriptions of meaning:

Smith will judge Jones to mean addition by ‘plus’ only if he judges that Jone’s answers to particular addition problems agree with those *he* is inclined to give, or, if they occasionally disagree, he can interpret Jones as at least following the proper procedure... If Jones consistently fails to give responses in agreement (in this broad sense) with Smith’s, Smith will judge that he does not mean addition by ‘plus’.²

If Jones and Smith both were to give the answer 125 to the above question, then certainly, they would be in a position to say that neither meant quaddition. Yet they would not be in a position to say, in virtue of their agreement, that they both meant addition, or even that they both meant the same thing. The skeptic’s problem still remains: it is an open question as to whether Smith and Jim mean addition, or some other function. Furthermore, it is unclear just how disagreement can warrant Smith in claiming that Jones doesn’t mean addition, unless there is some antecedent warrant for asserting that Smith means addition. Neither is it clear how agreement or disagreement can warrant any answer to the question of whether Smith or Jones are using ‘plus’ consistently with the way that either used it previously. So, in addition to the other worries that have been raised about Kripke’s skeptical solution, the claim that it allows for warranted assertion of the aforementioned meaning-claims is dubious.

Dispositionalism

Taking from Wittgenstein the notion that following a rule is the expression of an ability, some have been inclined to put forth the view that the facts which the rule-skeptic seeks are facts about a speaker’s disposition to behave in certain ways.³ There are several varieties of this view,

²Saul Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*. Cambridge, 1982 p.91.

³Among those who have at one time or another expressed support for dispositionalism are Simon Blackburn in “The Individual Strikes Back,” *Synthese*, vol. 58, 1984; Paul Coates in “Kripke’s Skeptical Paradox,” *Mind*, vol. 95 no. 377, January, 1986; and Paul Horwich in “Meaning, Use, and Truth” *Mind*, vol. 104, no. 414, April, 1995.

resulting from the apparent failure of “naive” dispositionalism to satisfy the normative requirements of meaning. The naive view might be stated thus: the fact that subject S is disposed to use the sign w in such-and-such a way fixes what w means in S ’s lexicon. So, a speaker means addition by ‘plus’ just in case he is disposed to give the sum of any numbers linked by the sign ‘plus’. This strategy attempts to solve the worry that a speaker’s past usage of a sign doesn’t uniquely determine what a speaker means by the sign - past usage isn’t capable of determining, for example, whether a speaker means addition or some quaddition-like function by ‘plus’.

Kripke presents several arguments against this view. The “argument from error” is motivated in part by Wittgenstein’s claim (P.I. §258) that the correct use of a sign cannot be based on the supposition that “whatever is going to seem right to me is right.” Correctness in the use of a sign seems to require objective standards - the use must be subject to correction by others; misuse must be verifiable. Intuitively, one who was disposed to use the sign ‘plus’ in such a way as to respond to the question “What is 68 plus 57?” with the answer ‘5’ has made a mistake. The dispositionalist theory, though, doesn’t seem to allow for ascriptions of correctness and incorrectness. How S is disposed to use the sign ‘ w ’ fixes what S means by ‘ w ’, and so if S is disposed to apply the sign ‘plus’ in the aforementioned way, then whenever he does so apply it, it cannot be said that he has made a mistake at all, but rather, all that can be said is that his use conforms to a non-standard meaning. It is, however, a fundamental feature of meaning that a sign can be used correctly and incorrectly. If the dispositionalist cannot accommodate this notion, then his theory is unsustainable.

The dispositionalist may attempt to save his approach to the problem by establishing a privileged disposition that serves as the standard for correct usage. The communitarian approach

identifies this privileged disposition with the dispositions held by most of the members of a community. Correct use of a sign depends on the subject's conformity to the dispositions of most members to use the term. This is distinguished from the view that Kripke advocates in several ways. Most importantly, the community-disposition account should be seen as a direct answer to the skeptic's problem. That being the case, the proponents of this view do not deny, as Kripke does, the existence of meaning-facts and truth-conditions for ascriptions of meaning. Another difference lies in the fact that Kripke's account does not appeal to how the members of a community would behave in some hypothetical situation. Instead, communal agreement in *actual* cases is all that is needed for warranted assertions about meaning. Despite these differences, though, worries similar to those offered for Kripke's communal-agreement account arise for the communal-disposition account.

Again, it seems that a community can go off-track with respect to its use of a word. To borrow an example from Boghossian, consider a community which is disposed to use the term 'horse' both to refer to horses, and to refer to horse-like cows on dark nights. Assume further that, were the members of this community to encounter the horse-like cows during the daytime, they would be disposed to call them cows, not horses. The most natural response to this scenario is to say that the community has made a mistake, and that its application of the word 'horse' to the horse-like cows on dark nights is incorrect. According to the community-disposition account, however, the term 'horse' has here a disjunctive meaning: it refers to either genuine horses, or horse-like cows on dark nights. The community-disposition account suffers from a problem similar to one encountered during the discussion of naive-dispositionalism, namely, that at the level of the community, it cannot allow for ascriptions of correctness or incorrectness. It can

only distinguish between different meanings, no one of which has any priority over another. As such, it should be rejected.

A natural response to this objection is to point out that systematic mistakes are likely only to occur in certain specifiable circumstances. If these mistake-inducing circumstances can be identified, then a set of optimal conditions can be given in which mistakes of the above sort will not occur. If we consider only that aspect of a person's disposition to use a term wherein these conditions obtain as being relevant for establishing meaning, then an account can be given that will allow for ascriptions of correctness and incorrectness at both the individual and community level. Notice that in so doing, the dispositionalist no longer needs to appeal to the dispositions of the community. The community-disposition thesis sought to give priority to the dispositions of the community as a way of establishing a set of dispositions to serve as the standard of correctness, but this proved to be unsatisfactory. The appeal to optimal conditions seeks to give priority to the dispositions to use terms in specific circumstances - reference to the community becomes superfluous in this case. In considering those dispositions only under optimal conditions, the dispositionalist needs only to consider individuals, for an individual operating in these conditions is incapable of error.

The practical difficulty in establishing a set of optimal conditions can for the moment be ignored, for though this would surely be a significant undertaking, there are more troubling problems for this view. Were someone to develop a statement of the optimal-conditions version of dispositionalism, it might look like this:

S means m by 'w' if, under conditions O, S is disposed to apply 'w' to m's

This view is, unfortunately, doomed. It is clear that being tired, distracted, drunk, brain-damaged, and so on are conditions in which one would be disposed to make mistakes regarding

word usage, but a problem arises when one attempts to justify why the conditions that he describes as optimal are optimal. It might be claimed that past observation of people under these conditions has shown that they are inclined to make mistakes in their use of words, but this presupposes the notion of correctness and meaning with respect to a given word. The fact that a person's use of a term while tired or distracted diverges from his use while wide awake and focused doesn't itself seem to establish that one set of conditions is optimal and the other deficient. If S is disposed to apply ' w ' to m 's in C_1 and is also disposed to apply ' w ' to n 's in C_2 , what is to justify the claim that C_1 represents optimal conditions xor that C_2 does? What is to justify the claim that S means m by ' w ', xor that he means n by ' w '? It seems that some prior notion of the tendency of people under certain conditions to make mistakes is needed, lest our designation of optimal conditions be arbitrary.

The task of the dispositionalist is to give necessary and sufficient conditions for a subject's meaning something by a given sign completely in naturalistic terms. And this, it seems, will require an account of various psychological phenomena in behavioral terms. For it seems clear that one's use of a word is influenced by one's beliefs, among other things, and the dispositionalist must have some story to tell in this regard - likely by specifying which beliefs (namely, true ones) are required for proper usage (the possession of which would be an optimal condition). Even assuming that one could specify, in a non-question begging way, which beliefs a person must have to be operating under optimal conditions (a task that seems impossible), he would have to further give a purely behaviorist account of belief. So, then, it would appear that a satisfactory dispositionalist account requires the validation of the entire behaviorist project. This is a task with little hope of success.

Non-Reductive Accounts

The dispositionalist seeks to give a reductive analysis of meaning in terms of naturalistic facts. This strategy has been shown to face problems which, if not insurmountable, are quite daunting. The most successful portion of Kripke's *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* are those passages which attempt to highlight the problems of reductionism. Yet the failure of reductionism should not lead immediately to an embrace of Kripke's skeptical solution, or of skepticism about meaning and rule-following. There is another strategy for answering Kripke's skeptic in a straightforward way.

Kripke does not argue for naturalism, and though his skeptic does not explicitly restrict the search for meaning-fixing facts to naturalistic ones, that only naturalistic facts are considered in the text implies a presumption in favor of naturalism. Here, 'naturalism', means the view that all normative claims supervene on purely descriptive, natural, non-normative facts. Such facts are usually given in behavioral terms. In opposition to this view is non-naturalism, which might be described as the claim that there is a certain species of fact which has a normative component and is not reducible to a purely natural fact. According to this view, normativity is a primitive feature of the world.

What might an argument for naturalism look like? One might argue that this is a conceptual truth: genuine facts are, by their very nature, wholly descriptive. Any supposed non-natural facts would have an irreducible normative component, thereby disqualifying them as candidates for facthood. There are at least two problems with this argument. In the first place, if by stipulating that facts are wholly descriptive, one means that they are naturalistic, then the argument begs the question against the non-naturalist. In the second place, if 'descriptive' is not intended as meaning the same thing as 'natural', then it might be possible for a non-naturalist to

accept descriptivism. A descriptive claim might be taken to be nothing more than the claim that the world is a certain way. Such a thin view of descriptivism leaves room for a descriptive non-naturalism. Normative facts might take the following form: "Such-and-such behavior in such-and-such circumstances is permissible." Any claim which has this form would appear to be both descriptive and normative. In any event, this argument from conceptual analysis doesn't offer good reason for accepting the naturalist thesis.

Another strategy might be to appeal to an argument from queerness.⁴ If normative facts are not reducible to natural facts, then epistemic access to these facts requires a special faculty not required for access to natural facts. More precisely, normative facts would have to be intrinsically motivating, so that upon the recognition that one of these facts obtained, an agent would be compelled to act in a certain way. However, no good story has been told about this special faculty, and there are reasons for thinking that it does not exist. In the absence of a good story about how one can have epistemic access to normative facts, anyone who postulates irreducible normative properties flirts with unverifiability. If it turned out that normative claims were not verifiable, and one were to accept Ayer's principle of verification, the result would be that normative claims were meaningless. Yet even if one were to deny the principle of verification, the seemingly queer nature of normative properties, so different from that of any other entity, might be enough to dissuade someone from postulating them.

To address the metaphysical concern first, the principle of economy urges against the postulation of entities beyond what is necessary. Postulating normative properties which cannot be reduced to natural properties would clutter up one's ontology a bit, and if these properties are

⁴What follows is a redeployment of Mackie's argument against objective values. Cf. *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, London, 1977, pp.38-42.

queer, hesitation would be further warranted. It has been shown, however, that attempts to account for certain normative properties and facts by reducing them to natural properties and facts are themselves quite problematic. This is not to say that a complete survey of reductive accounts of meaning has been accomplished here - only the more prominent versions have been discussed. Nevertheless, the worries that have been raised are general enough to apply to many, if not all, reductive accounts. Kripke's irrealism doesn't seem to be a desirable alternative to reductionism. The global non-factualism that he advocates is a bitter pill to swallow, and it is questionable whether his emphasis on agreement can even allow for warranted assertions of correctness. The remaining option, to countenance some sort of error-theory, is even more undesirable. So, while it is true that, all other things being equal, postulating queer properties should be avoided, all things are not, in fact, equal.

As for the epistemic concern, consider what such a charge would amount to: if an account of a special faculty for epistemic access to normative properties was lacking, then there would be no way to give a proper account of a person's ability to know the truth conditions of normative claims, including claims about meaning - and lacking such an account, any judgement about the truth conditions of these claims would appear unjustified. The problem goes much deeper, in a very familiar way: if one cannot know the truth of statements about meaning, then it would seem that one could not know the truth of any statement. Worrisome indeed. Yet anyone bringing this charge against the non-naturalist has to give reasons for thinking that a) this special faculty is needed and b) humans don't have it. We should ask ourselves whether this poses the same worries for the sort of non-naturalism under consideration as it does for ethical non-naturalism. Mackie was concerned with access to properties and facts which possess "authoritative prescriptivity", such that the appreciation of the truth of some moral fact would

impel a person to act. In contrast, normativity with respect to meaning just amounts to there being correct ways of using a term. Given that a term is meaningful, then there are certain facts about what it is correct to apply the term to. This doesn't have the mysterious appearance that so concerned Mackie, and the demand for a special faculty seems misguided in this case. If this is right, then our access to normative facts of this sort is in no worse shape than our access to natural facts.

Another argument against non-reductionism might go something like this: by adopting the non-reductionist strategy, one will be in a position to respond to the skeptic about meaning with semantic facts. But the response "Because *S* did mean *m* by '*w*'" is not an appropriate response to the question of what fact justifies the claim that "*S* meant *m* by '*w*'". Such an answer is vacuous. If this strategy were to be adopted, nothing interesting could be said about meaning. Whatever problems the alternative accounts had, surely none was as damaging as this!

Claiming the following does seem a little odd.

"*S* meant *m* by '*w*'" is true if and only if ***S meant m by 'w'***

Anyone asking for a fact which established the semantic claim would probably not be entirely satisfied with this. The non-reductionist could simply stand firm, and assert that any worries that result from this are merely the result of latent reductionist tendencies. Meaning facts, on this view, would be on par with natural facts, and though some may have concerns about a correspondence theory of truth, one would not think it so strange to respond to the question of what fact justifies the claim "The cat is on the mat" by appeal to the fact that the cat was on the mat. On the other hand, the non-reductionist does not have to be committed to the view that there are no specifiable conditions for meaning. All he needs to be committed to is the

claim that if there are conditions for speaker or sentence meaning, that these conditions are irreducibly normative or intentional.

A complete account of a non-reductive theory about normativity is outside the scope of this essay. However, reasons have been given (it is hoped) for thinking that this is the proper strategy to adopt. Kripke's skeptical solution is unconvincing and apparently flawed. In perhaps one of the his most revealing statements, he writes: "What follows from these assertability conditions is *not* that the answer everyone gives to an addition problem is, by definition, the correct one, but rather the platitude that, if everyone agrees upon a certain answer, then no one will feel justified in calling the answer wrong."⁵ If one is to take Kripke at his word, then it would seem that his skeptical solution solves no problem. That no one *feels* justified in calling an answer wrong is quite a different thing than actually being justified or warranted in making such a claim. As such, even if one were to reject the truth-conditional theory of meaning, the skeptical solution doesn't even account for warranted assertion of meaning claims.

The strategy for any reductionist will be to explain normative facts in terms of behavioral features of speakers, which will likely be given in terms of behavioral dispositions. The most promising dispositional accounts have been considered here and found wanting. It doesn't seem as if it will be possible to develop a dispositional account which will not fall afoul of the worries about the feasibility of the overall behaviorist project, and moreover, it seems unlikely that any privileged disposition can be singled out without tacitly appealing to a notion of correctness.

For these reasons, a different tack is needed. The strategy being suggested here is not without its problems, but it is hoped that some of the more obvious objections have been

⁵Saul Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*. Cambridge, 1982, p.112.

addressed here. In the light of the glaring deficiencies of the alternative theories, the initial unease that might be experienced at the thought of taking normative facts, including semantic facts, as irreducible should be mitigated.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUDING REMARKS

At the outset of this work, two questions were raised. The first, exegetical in nature, was the question of whether Kripke's reading of Wittgenstein was correct. In the second chapter, the first two-hundred sections of the *Investigations* were examined in an effort to paint a picture of Wittgenstein's later thoughts on meaning, understanding, and rule-following. A common theme emerged: the application conditions for these concepts are not to be viewed as consisting in the possession of some mental state or standing in relations to some mental states. A word doesn't get its meaning from some associated mental image. Rather, the meaning of a word is to be read off of how the word is used. Since not just any use of the word is relevant to establishing its meaning, there must be more to the story than simply "meaning is use." Thus, it emerged that meaning is to be read off of rule-governed use. The use of a word is bound up with the activities of explaining the use, teaching the use, justifying the use, and so on. Each of these activities involves the giving of some statement which serves to explain, establish a standard of correctness, or justify. This statement is the rule governing the use of the word. Understanding a rule is not just a matter of being able to cite the rule; one must also be capable of behaving according to the dictates of the rule. Now, any rule is open to various interpretations (which should be seen as the giving of another sentence elaborating on the original formulation). The worry arises that there is no privileged interpretation, and as such, *any* act could be made to square with any rule. Thus we have the makings of skepticism about rules. But Wittgenstein has an immediate answer to this problem: interpretations do not determine the meaning of the rule; instead, the meaning of the rule is given by the way the rule is used in normative behavior and the regularity of the associated behavior. Wittgenstein does not treat the problem brought up in

§201 of the *Investigations* as a serious concern that threatens the notion of rule-following.

Rather, the problem arises as a consequence of a flawed view of what determines which actions accord with a rule. It is interesting that Kripke never mentions the interpretation-view of rules in his work on Wittgenstein. Instead, he seems to have interpreted these passages as a rejection of meaning-fixing facts. Though Wittgenstein may have been a non-factualist, this is certainly not evident in the passages Kripke cites.

The skeptical solution that Kripke attributes to Wittgenstein bears little resemblance to what is written in the *Investigations*. The communal assertability conditions that form the core of this solution seems to stem from a misreading of Wittgenstein's comments on private language. The earliest comments in this regard can be found in §199, and taken in context, the prohibition seems to be not on isolated rule-followers, but on single instances of rule-following. Following a rule is a practice, and as such, is not the type of thing that can happen just once. Moreover, in later sections of the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein allows for isolated speakers. This is pretty strong evidence that he did not view language as essentially requiring the existence of other speakers with whom one shares a practice, which is how he was interpreted by Kripke.

The second question at issue in this work was whether or not a viable solution could be found to the problem highlighted by Kripke's skeptic. It was contended that the skeptical solution presented by Kripke was unsatisfactory. The focus on the agreement between members of a community seems wrongheaded - agreement cannot establish anything more than the fact that the actions of people do, in practice, agree. Moreover, the global non-factualism that the proponent of the skeptical solution seems committed to is a bitter pill to swallow. Looking at the straight answers to the skeptic, significant problems with the more promising versions of reductionism were found. Naive dispositionalism doesn't allow for a standard of correctness, and

attempts to focus on the dispositions of a community seems to suffer from the same problem on the communal-level. The attempt to give priority to those dispositions under optimal conditions fails in that optimal conditions can only be established if there is some notion of correctness already in place Furthermore, as what a speaker means by a certain term has something to do with the beliefs that he has, the dispositionalist needs to be in a position to give a naturalistic analysis of psychological terms, which is a task that isn't likely to be accomplished.

The problems faced by irrealism and reductionism led to the consideration of a non-reductive account. The general strategy goes something like this: Kripke's skeptic can be given a direct answer as to the question of what fact establishes that a speaker meant such-and-such by a certain term, but these facts are not reducible to natural facts. Normative properties, according to this account, should be taken as fundamental and on a par with natural properties. A lot of work is left to be done with respect to fleshing out this account, to be sure. All that has been done here is to address some of the major concerns that might argue against adopting this strategy. The problems faced by the alternatives seem to be greater than those facing non-reductionism, and as such, it should be seen as a viable alternative.

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Jonathan Robert Hendrix, Jr. was born in Lexington, SC. He graduated from Heathwood Hall Episcopal School in 1997. He attended the University of South Carolina from 1997 until 2001, majoring in history and philosophy. In 2003, he returned to academia as a graduate student in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Florida, completing his master's thesis in 2007.