

CRITICAL STUDY:  
ON MISUNDERSTANDING WITTGENSTEIN:  
KRIPKE'S PRIVATE LANGUAGE ARGUMENT

1. "WITTGENSTEIN'S ARGUMENT AS IT STRUCK KRIPKE"

After a long period of neglect, Wittgenstein's discussions of rule-following have, in the last few years, received some serious attention. This has been stimulated partly by a growing interest in his philosophy of mathematics, and partly by the publication of the enlarged edition of his *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, which includes a new fifty-page section on rule-following. Perhaps the most important stimulus, however, is the conviction among many philosophers that the confrontation between realism and anti-realism, between truth-conditional semantics and semantic theories involving the notion of assertion-conditions, is *the* fundamental issue in contemporary philosophy. Accordingly, the early Wittgenstein is strapped to the truth-conditions bandwagon, and the later Wittgenstein, strait-jacketed within the confines of anti-realism, is harnessed to the assertion-conditions one. Since his remarks on rules have a clear bearing on issues that interest participants in this confrontation, they have become the focus of extensive discussion.

Saul Kripke's essay 'Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language'<sup>1</sup> applies this currently popular picture of Wittgenstein's early and later work to a reconsideration of the famous private language argument in the *Philosophical Investigations* §§243 ff. The discussion of rule-following that *precedes* the private language argument (PI §§143–242) is the focal point of his examination, and from it he draws a variety of original and controversial conclusions. Rather disarmingly, he suggests at the outset that

the present paper should be thought of as expounding neither 'Wittgenstein's' argument nor 'Kripke's': rather Wittgenstein's argument as it struck Kripke.<sup>2</sup>

To use the writings of a philosopher as a Rorschach spot is perfectly legitimate. But there is an ever-present danger that one's ruminations will be taken as descriptions of the spot. Indeed, in the course of his

reflections Kripke attributes to Wittgenstein a variety of views he never held, and imposes upon his writings a variety of interpretations for which there is no licence. In this paper we shall try to differentiate sharply between Wittgenstein's argument as it struck Kripke and Wittgenstein's argument, and to demonstrate that on some salient issues Wittgenstein's argument not only differs from, but actually confutes Kripke's picture.

More than mere exegetical correctness is involved here. Kripke is surely right in thinking that sections 134–243 of the *Investigations* contain some of the most original and significant philosophical reflections written this century. If the line of argument pursued in them is valid, their implications, both within philosophy and without, are considerable. Modern philosophical logic, theoretical linguistics, as well as branches of empirical psychology would stand in need of re-evaluation. So it is important to understand what Wittgenstein was arguing. Only then can we assess it, and see where we stand.

Kripke's interpretation of the core of the *Philosophical Investigations* is as follows. The 'real private language argument' is not in §§243 ff, but in §§143–242. Indeed the *conclusion* of the private language argument is stated in §202:

And hence also 'obeying a rule' is a practice. And to *think* one is obeying a rule is not to obey a rule. Hence it is not possible to obey a rule 'privately': otherwise thinking one was obeying a rule would be the same thing as obeying it.

The problem Wittgenstein confronts in these hundred sections is, Kripke claims, a sceptical one. The discussion of the rule for forming the series of even integers is designed to raise the question of how I can know whether my current use of a word (e.g., 'plus') coheres with what I previously meant by it, given that my current use is (or can always be made out to be) a novel application. Nothing in any instructions given to me (or which I give myself) forces me to go on '1002, 1004', rather than '1004, 1008'; the instructions I gave, the examples I produced, can be made out to be consistent with both ways of proceeding. Equally, nothing in my mind constituted the fact of my meaning myself to go on thus or otherwise. (I didn't run through an infinite series in an instant and the formula I had in mind has no magical powers to generate the answer.) Scepticism about being able to know whether I am using a word in accord with what I meant by it leads to the paradox stated at §201:

This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule. The answer was: if everything 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.

So epistemological scepticism about applying a word in accord with what one means by it leads to the conclusion that there can be no meaning at all, and language is impossible. This paradox is 'perhaps the central problem of *Philosophical Investigations*'.<sup>3</sup>

Wittgenstein, according to Kripke, gives a 'sceptical solution', of a Humean form, to his sceptical problem. This strategy consists in accepting the sceptic's premises but denying that the sceptical conclusion follows from them. So Wittgenstein agrees that there is no fact-in-the-world that constitutes meaning something by one's words. But this annihilates the possibility of meaning only on the assumption that sense is given by truth-conditions (i.e., correspondence to possible facts-in-the-world). He allegedly repudiates this theory, replacing it by the picture of sense as determined by conditions for assertion. The assertion-conditions for my meaning *W* by '*W*' are my being inclined to apply '*W*' thus and so, given that the rest of the community is too. In these circumstances there is no reason to *deny* that my current ('novel') application of '*W*' accords with what I (and others) previously meant by '*W*'. Therefore, meaning something by a word requires a community to supply agreement and to prevent thinking one is following a rule and following a rule from collapsing into each other. Hence 'it is not possible to obey a rule "privately"', and the conclusion of the private language argument is really stated before what goes by the name of 'the private language argument' has even begun. This does not, however, preclude our conceiving of Robinson Crusoe meaning something by his words as he talks to himself on his desert island. For in so conceiving of him 'we are taking him into our community and applying our criteria for rule following to him.'<sup>4</sup> A physically isolated person can follow rules, but a person considered in isolation cannot.

This sketch provides the bare outline of Kripke's colourful painting. We shall fill in more detail only where necessary.

## 2. SCEPTICISM ABOUT WITTGENSTEIN'S 'SCEPTICAL PROBLEM' AND 'SCEPTICAL SOLUTION'

Although Wittgenstein found some of the problems of scepticism

interesting, even revealing (as in *On Certainty*), anyone familiar with Wittgenstein's work will feel sceptical about the suggestion that he made a sceptical problem the *centre piece* of his *chef d'oeuvre*. In his very first philosophical notes he wrote against Russell:

Scepticism is *not* irrefutable, but *obvious nonsense* if it tries to doubt where no question can be asked.

For doubt can only exist where a question exists; a question can only exist where an answer exists, and this can only exist where something *can* be said.<sup>5</sup>

In his last notes on certainty he wrote:

The queer thing is that even though I find it quite correct for someone to say "Rubbish!" and so brush aside the attempt to confuse him with doubts at bedrock, – nevertheless, I hold it to be incorrect if he seeks to defend himself (using, e.g. the words "I know").<sup>6</sup>

It would be very surprising to discover that someone who throughout his life found philosophical scepticism *nonsensical*, a subtle violation of the bounds of sense, should actually make a sceptical problem the pivotal point of his work. It would be even more surprising to find him accepting the sceptic's premises, the 'doubts at bedrock', rather than showing that they are 'rubbish'.

Initial qualms may be strengthened by reflection on the oddity of the so-called scepticism. What is classically known as scepticism typically involves challenging an apparent evidential nexus. The sceptic agrees that we *do* know the truth of statements about subjective experience, but, since they do not entail statements about objects, he denies that we really know anything about the material world. In a more obliging frame of mind, he accepts the possibility of knowledge about the behaviour of others (or about memories and current evidence, or singular statements) but denies that it supports cognitive claims about other minds (the past, inductive generalizations). But Kripke's sceptic, unlike the classical sceptic, saws off the branch on which he is sitting. For he is not claiming that certain *given* knowledge fails to support other commonly accepted cognitive claims. His conclusion is not that he certainly means either *a* or *b* by '*W*', but cannot be sure which; nor is it that he knows what he now means, but cannot be certain whether it is the same as what he meant yesterday. Rather, he concludes with 'the paradox' that there is no such thing as meaning, so language cannot be possible. But *this* is not scepticism at all; it is conceptual nihilism, and,

unlike classical scepticism, it is *manifestly* self-refuting. Why his argument is wrong may be worth investigating (as with any paradox), but *that* it is wrong is indubitable. It is not a sceptical problem but an absurdity.

To defend common sense presumably means to find good reasons why what we ordinarily and more or less unreflectively believe is true, and is known to be true. Kripke's Wittgenstein<sup>7</sup> is a common-sense philosopher, holding that philosophy only states what everyone admits. He resembles Hume, who wrote "We may well ask, *what causes induce us to believe in the existence of body?* but it is vain to ask, *whether there be body or not?* That is a point, which we must take for granted in all our reasonings."<sup>8</sup> The similarity with Hume allegedly reaches deeper, since Kripke's Wittgenstein pursues a Humean strategy of giving a 'sceptical solution' to his sceptical problem, i.e., he concedes that the sceptic's negative assertions are unanswerable, but contends that our ordinary belief is nevertheless justifiable, because it does not require the justification the sceptic has shown to be untenable. The switch from truth-conditional semantics to assertability conditions is argued to effect just this move.

This analysis is wrong on several counts. First, Hume does *not*, in his analysis of the self, objectivity, and causation, defend common sense. He is not claiming that philosophy never casts doubt on the rational justification of ordinary beliefs, but that philosophy is impotent to *change* them. What Kripke quotes follows this passage:

Nature, by an absolute and uncontrollable necessity has determin'd us to judge as well as to breathe and feel . . . Whoever has taken the pains to refute the cavils of this *total* scepticism, has really disputed without an antagonist, and endeavour'd by arguments to establish a faculty, which nature has antecedently implanted in the mind, and rendered unavoidable . . .

. . . If belief, therefore, were a simple act of thought without any peculiar manner of conception, or the addition of a force and vivacity, it must infallibly destroy itself and in every case terminate in a total suspence of judgment. But as experience will sufficiently convince anyone who thinks it worthwhile to try, that though he can find no error in the foregoing arguments, yet he continues to believe and think and reason as usual, he may safely conclude, that his reasoning and belief is some sensation or peculiar manner of conception which 'tis impossible for mere ideas and reflections to destroy.

Hume insists that we have *no* good reason to believe in the existence of objective particulars (no good reason to believe that our several perceptions belong to a unitary self; etc.). Far from defending 'common

sense', he insists that *all* the arguments are on the side of the sceptic. Rational investigation *proves* that the fundamental beliefs of 'common sense' are *fictions*, generated by the workings of the imagination according to natural laws of mental association.

Second, Hume's 'sceptical solution' does *not* consist in giving a *justification* for our ordinary beliefs, i.e., rational grounds showing them to be well-founded. Rather, he defends a radical split between theory and practice, between Reason and Nature, in the following sense. Though every argument speaks against belief in objectivity, this *cannot affect our beliefs*. "Philosophy would render us entirely Pyrrhonian were not nature too strong for it."<sup>9</sup> He denied the Pyrrhonist thesis that sceptical arguments will lead to suspension of belief and ataraxia. Belief is not determined by Reason, but by Nature. Hume was indeed not trying to *subvert* our beliefs, but to show that they are determined, non-rationally, causally, by Nature *against* Reason.<sup>10</sup>

Third, not only is Hume thus misrepresented, but so also is Wittgenstein. He insisted that he was *not* defending any *opinions*: 'On all questions we discuss I have no opinion; and if I had, and it disagreed with one of your opinions, I would at once give it up for the sake of argument, because it would be of no importance for our discussion.'<sup>11</sup> Nor was he defending common sense, if that means giving reasons for believing that material objects exist independently of our perceptions of them, or that other people enjoy experiences, or that we mean things by our words, etc. Rather the task, in this respect, consists in showing that the philosophical puzzle (of scepticism, idealism or solipsism) rests on systematically traversing the limits of sense. His purpose was the investigation of ordinary *concepts* which are used in the expression of common sense beliefs. But he was not concerned to defend those beliefs, rather to clarify those concepts. For the problems of philosophy arise through the distortion and misuse of ordinary concepts, and the way back to sanity consists in obtaining an *Übersicht* of the problematic expressions.

Finally, Kripke contends that in the course of his 'sceptical solution' to his 'sceptical problem' Wittgenstein in effect denies some of our ordinary beliefs, contrary to his principle that 'If one tried to advance *theses* in philosophy it would never be possible to debate them, because everyone would agree to them.'<sup>12</sup> Wittgenstein is forced to do this because he *accepts* the apparent sceptical denials of our ordinary assertions, and he only saves himself from blatant inconsistency by

'cagily' refusing to state his conclusions in the form of definite theses or straightforward formulations. It is, in fact, this caginess that explains his inability to write a work with conventionally organized arguments. What 'thesis' is Wittgenstein supposed to be propounding here? According to Kripke, 'Wittgenstein holds, with the sceptic, that there is no fact as to whether I mean plus or quus.'<sup>13</sup>

This is quite wrong. If Wittgenstein had claimed that when *A* told *B* to expand the series '+2', *A* did *not* mean *B* to go on '1002, 1004 . . .', he would be denying what we all admit. But he does not claim this: 'Certainly; and you can also say you *meant* it then; only you should not let yourself be misled by the grammar of the words "know" and "mean".'<sup>14</sup> And if *A* meant such and such, then, Wittgenstein might add, it is a fact that he meant such and such (*infra*). What Wittgenstein is denying is a *philosophical* claim, viz., that the 'act of meaning' effects miracles, such as traversing an infinite series in a flash, and a *philosophical* thesis, viz., that my meaning such and such is a fact-in-the-world (or more specifically, a fact-in-my-mind), and that my justification for saying that I meant addition by 'plus' is that I have observed this fact in my mind. To deny this is not to deny what we all admit, but to repudiate a nonsensical metaphysical theory.

The considerations so far are merely intended to foster initial doubts about Kripke's interpretation. It is, we suggest, *prima facie* implausible (though not impossible) that Wittgenstein should find sceptical problems and Humean sceptical solutions the fountainhead of philosophical insight. But there is a far greater likelihood that he would concur with Dr. Johnson's ironic remark about sceptics:

Truth, sir, is a cow, which will yield such people no more milk, and so they are gone to milk the bull.

### 3. THE 'PARADOX'

The interpretation of *Investigations*. §§201–202 is crucial for Kripke's case. For the 'paradox' of §201 is 'perhaps the central problem' of the whole book, and the conclusion of §202 'it is not possible to obey a rule "privately"' is not an anticipation of the private language argument,<sup>15</sup> but a statement of its conclusion, based on arguments already given. By §243 the impossibility of a private language has already been proved. The core problem is, according to Kripke, a *normative* version of Goodman's 'new riddle of induction'. No past fact about my mind or my

behaviour constituted my meaning *W* by ‘*W*’, so nothing in my present use of ‘*W*’ can constitute accord (or conflict) with what I meant by ‘*W*’ (the meaning I assigned to ‘*W*’). So I cannot know that in my current use I am still using ‘*W*’ with the same meaning. But not even God, were He to peer into my mind could know this. So there is no such thing as using a word in accord with a rule (with the meaning one gave it), no such thing as meaning something by a word, no such thing as a meaningful language. This is the ‘paradox’.

There are reasons for doubting whether §§201–2 are the pivotal remarks of the book. Also reasons for doubting that they are the culmination of a sceptical argument, or that they incorporate a refutation of the possibility of a private language. And there are alternative interpretations of the remarks which rest on better exegetical evidence. Finally, there are doubts whether Kripke’s ‘problem’ is coherently stateable. These considerations strengthen the doubts sown in the last section.

*The history of §§201–2:* The *Philosophical Investigations* Part 1 went through four typescript stages, dated 1938 (TS 220 in von Wright’s catalogue), 1942–43 (TS 239), January 1945 (the ‘Intermediate Version’), and 1945–46 (the final version, TS 227).<sup>16</sup> The Intermediate Version is *almost* identical with the final version in respect of argument from §1 to §217, but it *does not contain* §§201–3. So although the Intermediate Version contains the whole of the *argument* prior to §§201–3, it does not incorporate the ‘conclusion’ of the argument which, according to Kripke, is the pivotal point of the book. Moreover, the Intermediate Version contains the bulk of the private language argument,<sup>17</sup> and if §§201–3 already establish the conclusion of *the private language argument*, and §243 ff. only examine a potential counter example to the argument concerning sensations, it is odd, to say the least, that Wittgenstein omitted the *punctum saliens* in this draft.

Further light is shed on the matter by the *immediate* MS source, MS 129, pp. 119ff., which was written from 17 August 1944 onwards. Equally illuminating is the more remote MS source, the pocket notebook MS 180(a), which contains material transcribed into MS 129.

In MS 129 the context of the occurrence of §§201–3 is a discussion of how I know that this is red, i.e., what is now *Philosophical Investigations* §§377–81 (which does not occur in the Intermediate Version). The argument is concerned to establish that judgments such as ‘These images are identical’ or ‘This is red’ do not rest upon *recognition*. It runs



as follows: How do I know that this is red? One is inclined to say – I look at it and see *that it is red*. But how does this wordless seeing-that-it-is-red help me if I do not know what to say, how to express this ‘recognition’ in words? And sooner or later I must make the transition to using an expression. And at *this* point rules leave me in the lurch. What does *that* mean? It means<sup>18</sup> that rules are not self-applying. That sooner or later I have to *apply* a rule (by themselves as it were, they hang in the air). All good teaching, at the end of the day will not help me in this respect, for it cannot relieve me of the task of applying the rule, of ‘making a leap’ and *saying* ‘This is red’, or *acting* in a certain manner, which comes to the same thing. It is of no avail to try to interpose, between looking at an object and saying that it is red, a bogus recognitional stage of ‘seeing that it is *this*’, for now one would need a rule to effect the transition from this ‘seeing that it is *this*’ to saying it is red.<sup>19</sup> But *this* transition would be a ‘private’ one and the only rule which could guide it would be a private ostensive definition determining what *this* is. Yet justification must be public (cf. PI §378).

At this point in MS 129, 119 we have what is now §201 (‘This was our paradox . . .’), which originally began<sup>20</sup> ‘I found myself in the difficulty that it seemed . . .’, which clause Wittgenstein crossed out and replaced by ‘This was our paradox.’ This clearly refers back to what is now §198, which occurs earlier in the MS (p. 25). Why this allusion to these earlier difficulties at this point? Because the issue is similar, and the conclusion of §198 can be brought to bear on the present problem. §198 argued that the connection between the expression of a rule and the act that counts as accord with the rule is forged, *inter alia*, by training. We are taught that acting *thus* in response to such-and-such is correct, and anything else incorrect. We explain and justify *this*, but not another thing, by reference to the rule; and so on. To follow a rule is a custom; it involves a regular use of the expression of rules in training, teaching, explaining, and in giving reasons. Now Wittgenstein embroiders on these observations in the new context of a discussion of recognition and the unmediated application of ‘red’ and ‘same’ (as well as ‘same image’ and ‘red image’). The ‘earlier difficulty’ that a rule could not determine what to do in accord with it, the ‘paradox’, was evidently a misunderstanding. This is shown by the fact that no interpretation, no rule for the application of a rule can satisfy us, can definitively fix, *by itself*, what counts as accord. For each interpretation generates the same problem, viz., how is it to be applied.<sup>21</sup> Now Wittgenstein adds a new point to the

argument of §198, deepening the implications of the claim that what counts as following a rule is fixed by a normative regularity. What the absurd paradox that rules cannot guide one *shows* is that how one understands a rule need not be an interpretation, but is manifest *in acting*, in what we call ‘following the rule’. (The draft of §201 here is much the same as the final version.)<sup>22</sup> That we have ‘understood a rule in a certain way’, Wittgenstein continues, (‘Dass wir eine Regel “aufgefasst” haben’) is shown *inter alia* in the certainty, the absence of fumbling, in its application. Then follows *Investigations* §§202–3, i.e., *that* is why ‘following the rule’ is a practice. How does this observation bear on the discussion of colour recognition? It is simple: there can be no rule guiding the transition from a seeing-that-this-is-so to saying ‘This is red’ because there could be no technique of application for such a ‘rule’, no normative regularity in its employment, no custom of applying the word always in the same way, no practice (*infra*). The ‘private’ following of the (apparent) rule, a mental ostensive definition presupposed by the supposition that recognition intervenes between seeing and saying, is a sham, in which following a rule and thinking one is following a rule collapse into each other. The sequel continues to probe what is wrong with talking about judging an object to be red on the grounds of recognition, and develops into a discussion of seeing aspects.

MS 180(a) is the source underlying MS 129 on this theme. The longer discussion there begins with an examination of aspect-seeing (pp. 52ff.): do I *interpret* the figure now thus, now otherwise? Do I see everything always *as* something? Do I need words for such ‘visual interpretation’ or are words only necessary to communicate what I see? This evolves into a discussion of my judgments about my visual images, and thence into a long investigation into how I know that *this* is red? The key theme here too is to repudiate the suggestion that any recognitional process mediates between looking, and saying that this is red. Here occur early drafts of *Investigations* §§378–81 (in a different order). The draft of §201 (on p. 72) occurs after an examination of the following sequence of propositions: I see that it is red, but don’t know what it is called! I see that it is this colour, and I know that *this* colour is called such and such. Which colour? I recognise that it is *this*. But now I must make the transition to words or deeds! After a draft of §201 Wittgenstein elaborates: the rules here leave us in the lurch because there is no (genuine) transition from seeing that this is *this* to seeing that it is

*red*, there is no technique of going by a rule here. The 'rules' are free-floating. For this (pseudo-) transition is a private one. If the transition from looking at an object to applying the word 'red' cannot be made without mediation (by a recognitional process, or a private ostensive definition) then it cannot be made by means of a rule either. Consequently, 'to follow a rule' designates a practice, which cannot be replaced by the bogus appearance of a practice (cf. §202). This seems to abolish logic, he wrote in an early version of §242, but it does not. It is one thing to lay down methods of measurement, another to obtain results of measurement. But what we call 'measuring' is partly determined by a certain constancy in results of measurement.

What tentative conclusions can we draw from these data? First, the history of §§201–3 suggests that these remarks are *not* the pivot of the whole book. They were not incorporated in the Intermediate Version, which contained in completed form both the argument preceding §§201–3, and the bulk of the private-language argument. Secondly, in their original context they quite explicitly build upon §198 *and* upon the senselessness of private ostensive definition, *as established by the private-language argument*. Thirdly, their original purpose was to deepen the insight of §198 and to bring it to bear on fallacies concerning *recognition* as mediating between saying and seeing. It was not to defend a new paradox, viz., that there can be no such thing as following a rule. Fourthly, the MS context has nothing to do with scepticism in any shape or form, neither with sceptical problems nor with sceptical conclusions. (No where is it suggested that I do not know that poppies are red!) There is no evidence to suggest that Wittgenstein was concerned with a normative version of Goodman's new problem of induction. Fifthly, in its original contexts in both MSS the remark that following a rule is a practice has nothing directly to do with *social* practices. Its exclusive concern is with the fact that rule-following is an *activity*, a normative regularity of conduct which exhibits one's *Auffassung* of a rule, manifests how one understands a rule.

Do these sections incorporate the conclusion of the private language argument? That depends upon what one takes this conclusion to be! If it is held to be the contention that it is not possible to obey a rule 'privately', then, of course, it does. But that is unsurprising. More interestingly, in context, these sections do incorporate at least some of the conclusions of the private language argument, since *they explicitly presuppose them as having already been established*. And rightly so!

For the moment we claim not that this information is decisive, only that it is suggestive. It is possible, but improbable, that the repositioning of these remarks betokens a total reorientation of their sense. Perhaps, after composing the Intermediate Version, Wittgenstein suddenly realized that these two MS remarks, embedded in a discussion of knowing that this is red, concerned with dissolving confusions about recognition, in fact contained in crystallized form the core of his book.

*The interpretation of §§201–2:* A closer look at these crucial remarks in their final, different, context may strengthen our doubts. §201 paragraph (a) is clearly concerned with the question raised in §§198(a), viz., “‘But how can a rule show me what I have to do at *this* point. Whatever I do can, on some interpretation, be brought into accord with the rule.’” The problem here posed belongs to a series of closely interwoven questions running through §§139–242. If the first part of the book can be said to be concerned with uprooting the *Bedeutungskörper* conception of meaning in all its forms, this part is concerned with the more subtle *Regelskörper* conception. It aims to break the hold of a misguided conception of rules as mysteriously, magically, determining or constituting the meanings of expressions, and of understanding as a grasping of rules which then guide us along predetermined rails. The problem setting context is as follows. Earlier, Wittgenstein has argued that the meaning of an expression is its use. Equally the meaning of an expression is what is given by an explanation of meaning (§75); and an explanation of meaning is a rule for the use of the expression. But how can such an explanation, e.g., an ostensive definition or a series of examples or a general formula, determine the complex use of an expression? For any rule can be variously interpreted. The statement of a rule is not a repository from which the use unfolds, or a logical machine that generates applications of its own accord.

With respect to understanding, which is the correlate of explanation, the problem presents itself thus. We typically understand an expression in an instant. We can say what we understand by giving an explanation. But how can what is understood, grasped in an instant, be something like the use, the pattern of application of an expression, that is spread out in time (cf. §138)? And if what is understood is expressed by an explanation, a rule, how does that explanation, which can be variously projected, guide one in how one uses an expression? The apparent tension within these claims is the concern of §§143–242. This discussion falls into two main parts. The first (§§143–84)<sup>23</sup> explores the

concept of understanding (with a long digression on reading)<sup>24</sup> and establishes that understanding is not a mental event, state or process. Rather, to say of a person that he understands a word is to characterize him as having, at a particular time, a capacity, a mastery of a technique. Understanding is akin to an ability. The second part (§§185–242) clarifies the notions of an act's conforming (or conflicting) with a rule, and of an agent's following a rule. By particularization, this elucidates what it is for the use of a word to be correct (to conform to its explanation), and what it is to mean something and to understand an expression.

After exploring two suggestions of how accord with a rule is determined, each of which was unsatisfactory for quite different reasons, Wittgenstein turns to face *this* issue head-on in §198. If whatever one does can be brought into accord with the rule on some interpretation,<sup>25</sup> how on earth can a rule guide one? (Note that this is the identical problem of §201(a)). The answer is given immediately, with no suggestion of an irresolvable paradox that needs to be sidestepped. We ought not to say that because whatever we do can be brought into accord with the rule on some interpretation, therefore the rule cannot guide us. That *would* be absurd. Rather

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.

Only in a context in which there is an established technique of application of a rule, in which the rule is standardly involved in explanation and justification, in teaching and training, can questions of giving interpretations arise. For only then is the expression *used*, and an internal relation established between act and rule. Only if there *are* genuine rules, only if something does actually count as following (and everything else as going against), is there room for interpreting a rule correctly or incorrectly. But then what counts as *accord* with the rule is fixed independently of interpretations.

§§199–200 emphasize that normative behaviour requires a multiplicity of occasions as a context, an evident regularity of point and purpose. §201, removed from its MS context, is stripped of any connection with the problem of colour judgment, image-identification, interpreting double-aspect figures. Whereas it originally applied the resolution of the question of §198 to puzzles about recognition, in the course of which it deepened the argument of §198, now its sole role is

just the latter. §§198–9 answered the question: ‘How can a rule determine what counts as accord with it?’ by reference to the existence of a normative regularity of conduct. §201 adds a crucial point about understanding a rule (an ‘*Auffassung*’ of a rule):

how one understands a rule need *not* be an interpretation, but may be exhibited in what we call ‘following the rule’ and ‘going against it’ from case to case of its application.<sup>26</sup>

Understanding is mastery of a technique, and how one understands a rule is manifest in the exercise of that technique in practice, in what one does in various cases. Far from §201 accepting a paradox and by-passing it by means of a ‘sceptical solution’, Wittgenstein shows that here, as elsewhere, a paradox is a paradox only in a defective surrounding. If this is remedied the appearance of paradox will vanish.<sup>27</sup> For every paradox is disguised nonsense (and this one is barely even disguised!). Hence it may never be accepted and by-passed by other arguments. It must be dissolved by clarification of concepts.

What has been rejected in §201 is not the truism that rules guide action (or that we know that our use of an expression conforms with its meaning, or that we are actually applying expressions in accord with their explanations, i.e., the rules for their use). Rather, what is repudiated is the suggestion that a rule determines an action as being in accord with it only in virtue of an interpretation.

The first sentence of §202 merely repeats the penultimate point of §201, viz., how I understand a rule (*meine Auffassung*) is ultimately exhibited not by an interpretation (the substitution of one expression of a rule for another), but in what we call ‘following the rule’, i.e., in what I do in applying the rule. Hence following a rule is an activity, a *Praxis*. It is a misinterpretation to take ‘*Praxis*’ here to signify a social practice. The contrast here is not between an aria and a chorus, but between looking at a score and singing. The term ‘practice’ is used here in a similar sense to that in the phrase ‘in theory and in practice’. The point is *not* to establish that language necessarily involves a community (*infra*), but that ‘words are deeds’. But a practice is not mere action, it is regular action in accord with a rule, ‘not something that happens once, *no matter of what kind*’.<sup>28</sup> Note that nothing in this discussion involves any commitment to a multiplicity of *agents*. All the emphasis is on the regularity, the multiple *occasions*, of action (cf. §199). What is crucial for the concept of following a rule is recurrent action in appropriate contexts, action which *counts as* following the rule.<sup>29</sup> Whether others

are involved is a further question. Of course, with us social creatures rule-following is generally a social practice. But the point of the argument was not to establish this (obvious) fact, but rather to show that rule-following, and hence a language, is a kind of customary behaviour, a form of *action*, not of thought. The ‘foundations’ of language are not in private experience, the ‘given’ indefinables, but in normative regularities of conduct.

The remainder of §202, is, in this context, puzzling. For Wittgenstein has not yet explained what following a rule ‘privately’ means. The passage derives from MS 129, 121, where it occurs after the exposition of the private language argument (50 of the 74 remarks constituting the private language argument in the *Investigations* occur in MS 129, only two of which come after p. 121). There the allusion to ‘following a rule “privately”’ is perspicuously a *back-reference* to the private-language argument. In transposing this remark it has become, perhaps inadvertently, an anticipation of §258 (cf. MS 129, 43) of the private language argument.

#### 4. THE PRIVATE LANGUAGE ARGUMENT

The foregoing ‘archaeological’ investigations provide reasons for doubting whether the discussion up till §§201–2 contains the whole of the private language argument proper. We have not *proved* that the core question of the book is not a sceptical one, nor that the solution is not a ‘sceptical solution’. But if it is, it does not lie in the passages of §§198–202. Before going on to provide further argument, however, we should look forward from §202 to what is normally conceived as the private language argument in order to see whether Kripke’s claims about *it* rest on firmer foundations.

Kripke contends that the ‘real private language argument’ occurs prior to §243, and that the crucial considerations for that argument are contained in the discussion leading up to §202 which states its conclusions. What is commonly called ‘the private language argument’ deals with the application of the general conclusions about language drawn in §§138–242 to *the problem of sensations*.<sup>30</sup> Inner experience, like mathematics, allegedly seemed to Wittgenstein to be a counter-example to his view of rules, hence he treats it in detail. The connection between the discussion of sensations and the mathematical reflections is

shown in *Remarks on Foundations of Mathematics I*–§3:

*How do I know* that in working out the series +2 I must write “20004, 20006”, and not “20004, 20008”? – (The question: “How do I know that this colour is ‘red’?” is similar.)

This passage, Kripke contends,<sup>31</sup> illustrates that Wittgenstein regards the fundamental problems of the philosophy of mathematics and of the private language argument (i.e., the ‘problem’ of sensation language) as at root identical, stemming from his paradox. The impossibility of a private language (of sensations) follows from the incorrectness of the private model for language and rules, which is established in §202.

This interpretation of the concerns of §§243 ff. is perverse. The private language argument is not about ‘the problem of sensations’, which constitutes a *prima facie* counterexample to a thesis about rules. It is concerned with establishing the nonprimacy of the mental, the ‘inner’, the subjective. In this enterprise Wittgenstein is stalking a much larger quarry than a potential counterexample to one of his own ‘theses’ (what theses?), namely the conception of the mental underlying the mainstream of European philosophy since Descartes. It is noteworthy that in his ‘Notes for Lectures on “Private Experience” and “Sense Data”’ he worked with the examples of ‘seeing red’ and ‘having a red visual impression’ (i.e. perception) no less than with that of toothache (a sensation). And his concern is explicitly with the refutation of idealism and solipsism: the original fly in the fly-bottle is the solipsist!<sup>32</sup>

The private language argument is indeed built on the previous discussions, not only of rule-following but also of ostensive definitions, samples, meaning, understanding, and explanation. So too Kant’s ‘Dialectic’ is built on the ‘Analytic’, but that does not mean that the ‘real “Dialectic”’ is the ‘Analytic’. What is new in the private language argument is the question of whether a ‘private’ sample can be employed to give meaning to a word, whether a mental paradigm can be employed, via a stipulation or explanation to oneself, to constitute a norm of correct use.<sup>33</sup> Do the foundations of language lie in mental ostensive definitions of simple ‘indefinable’ perceptual predicates? Certainly a great tradition of European philosophy embraced such a conception, not only in the remote past, but in the writings of Russell, Carnap (at one stage) and other logical positivists, and indeed, for a brief time, in Wittgenstein’s own work.

Nor is it true that the question raised has implicitly been answered by the antecedent discussion of rule-following. After all, it may be argued



(and, alas, often is) that given biological nature,<sup>34</sup> you must have just what I have when we both look at tomatoes, hit our shins, etc. So you know what 'pain' or 'looks red' means from your exemplar, just as I know from my exemplar. And evolution, or a good angel, has so arranged matters that our exemplars are qualitatively identical. So our public language with its vast network of regularities of action is the confluence, or congruence, of our private languages. So thought and language rest firmly on the bedrock of the subjective.

It is, of course, true that in MSS 129 and 180(a) this argument is ruled out on the grounds that there can be no possibility of establishing an internal relation between a private sample, or 'subjective interpretation', and an action determined in a practice as being in accord with such a 'rule'. Moreover, if something can be a justification for me it must also be capable of functioning as a justification for others. So my 'seeing that this is *so*' cannot function as a justification. There can be no technique of applying a 'private rule'. Such a rule really would 'hang in the air', and there would indeed be no distinction between thinking one is following a rule and actually following it. Here one would have only a 'Schein-Praxis'. But the argument to establish these conclusions is the private language argument! By transposing §202 from the vicinity of §§377–81 it has been deprived of its argumentative support. As it stands, the last sentence does indeed state a conclusion of the private language argument, but now *it* 'hangs in the air'.

Even if we follow Kripke's interpretation, nothing significant is altered. 'Any individual who claims to have mastered the concept of . . . will be judged by the community to have done so if his particular responses agree with those of the community in enough cases, especially the simple ones.'<sup>35</sup> So we may accept, e.g., that we need community support to indulge in, say, colour predication (or any other concept-using game), but given that we agree in judgments, agreement in private definitions is ensured (by a good angel; or the 'argument to the best explanation'). Hence it is not the case that the conclusion of the private language argument has been proven before it is raised in §§243 ff.

It is no less misleading to point at *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* I §3 to establish a connection between considerations of rule-following and the private language argument proper. *Of course* there are deep affinities between questions in philosophy of mathematics and questions in philosophy of mind. But this passage does *not* point

to one. Here there is a connection between expanding the series '+2', and applying the predicate 'red'. But the concern of the private language argument is not with *objective* predications, but with *subjective* ones. Wittgenstein states that the question 'How do I know this colour is "red"?' is similar to the arithmetical question, not that the question 'How do I know that this experience is "seeing red"?' is similar. In fact the two pairs of questions are very different. In the first two cases we are concerned with the bedrock of rules. No further rule mediates between the rule 'Add 2' and saying '20004, 20006', or between an ostensive definition of 'red' and a judgment that this is red. But the private language argument focusses on the case of 'I am in pain' or 'I am seeing red' where the issue is not bridging the gulf between a genuine rule (an ostensive definition) and its use or application, but whether there is any such thing as a bogus 'private' rule, viz., a *private* ostensive definition. The argument turns on such matters as the 1st/3rd person asymmetry of psychological predicates, criterionless self-ascription and behavioural criteria for third-person ascription, the noncognitive status of avowals, etc.

Finally, it is misleading to represent the *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* as an examination of an apparent counterexample to the discussion of rules (as the private language argument examines sensations) – on the contrary, the discussion of rules, of rule-following and of application of rules is used to shed light upon the central questions of the philosophy of mathematics, viz., the nature of mathematical necessity, the status of proof, and the relation of mathematics to logic.

##### 5. KRIPKE'S SCEPTICAL PROBLEM

So far we have compared Kripke's discussion to Wittgenstein's, and found *prima facie* reasons for hesitating to embrace his interpretation. We now turn to an examination of the cogency of some of his arguments.

Kripke casts the central problem of the *Investigations* in terms of a 'sceptical hypothesis about a change in my usage'.<sup>36</sup> How can I know that my understanding of 'W', what I mean by 'W', determines the correctness of applying 'W' to *this*? The sceptic doubts whether any instruction I gave myself in the past compels or justifies this answer (rather than an absurd one). Kripke in effect shifts Wittgenstein's

problem of how, in what sense, a rule determines its application, to a problem of the relation between my past and present intentions, my meaning addition by 'plus' (and not a different arithmetical operation christened 'quaddition').

This shift is one from an altogether natural belief to a bizarre one. For it is natural to think that given that e.g., 'red' or 'plus' means what it does, it *follows* that *this* is red, or that  $68 + 57 = 125$ . But it is not obviously plausible or intuitively evident that in answering the questions 'What colour is this?' or 'What is  $68 + 57$ ?' one conceives of oneself as following an instruction that one gave oneself in the past. A fortiori in remarking 'that is a splendid red' (looking at a field of poppies) one does not conceive oneself as obeying one's past instructions about the meaning of 'red', as opposed to using the word 'red' in accord with its meaning.<sup>37</sup>

Why does Kripke's predicament lead first to scepticism and ultimately to conceptual nihilism? The reason offered is that we are naturally inclined to say that we 'know directly and with a fair degree of certainty'<sup>38</sup> that we mean *W* by '*W*'. But Wittgenstein shows that no mental event, act, activity, or process that may occur when we mean or understand something constitutes the meaning or understanding. This leaves us, apparently, only one move, viz., to claim that meaning *W* by '*W*' is an irreducible experience known directly by introspection. Against this Wittgenstein argues at length, and persuasively. We might try a last stand, contending that meaning is a primitive, *sui generis*, state:

Such a move may in a sense be irrefutable, and taken in an appropriate way Wittgenstein may even accept it. But it seems desperate: it leaves the nature of this postulated primitive state . . . completely mysterious. It is not supposed to be an introspectible state, yet we supposedly are aware of it with some fair degree of certainty whenever it occurs. For how else can each of us be confident that he *does*, at present, mean addition by 'plus'? Even more important is the logical difficulty implicit in Wittgenstein's sceptical argument. I think that Wittgenstein argues, not merely as we have said hitherto, that introspection shows that the alleged primitive state of understanding is a chimera but also that it is logically impossible (or at least that there is considerable logical difficulty) for there to be a state of 'meaning addition by "plus"' at all.<sup>39</sup>

This reasoning betokens misunderstandings of Wittgenstein's argument. Hence we will interrupt exposition of Kripke's sceptical problem to show where it went off Wittgenstein's rails.

First, according to Wittgenstein, 'I know that I mean . . .' is either an emphatic manner of saying that I mean such-and-such, or it is nonsense.<sup>40</sup> There is no distinction between my meaning *W* by '*W*' and my knowing that I mean *W* by '*W*' (unlike, say, my knowing that *A* is dead and *A*'s being dead). So there is no question here of 'knowing with a fair degree of certainty' or of 'knowing directly'. My (appropriately) confident assertion that I mean addition by 'plus' does not rest on evidence of any kind.

Second, according to Wittgenstein, meaning and intending are not experiences at all, a fortiori not irreducible experiences known introspectively. But it does not follow at all, nor did Wittgenstein suggest that it followed, that I do not mean or intend the things I take myself to mean or intend, the things I sincerely say that I mean or intend.<sup>41</sup> All that follows is that this philosophical picture of meaning and intending, of self-knowledge and privileged access, is wrong. What Wittgenstein is concerned with is not scepticism about our right to say that we mean this or that, that we intend so and so, but extirpation of philosophical confusion.

Third, Wittgenstein does not argue that introspection, i.e., an 'experimental method', reveals that as a matter of fact there is no 'primitive state of understanding'. He does indeed argue that it is logically impossible for there to be a *state* of meaning *W* by '*W*', but not in the manner Kripke suggests. And *this* argument does not even suggest that I do not mean what I normally say that I mean. The argument is that understanding, meaning, and intending are not *states* of any kind.<sup>42</sup> Mental states are such things as being nervous, excited, exhilarated. These obtain for a time and can be clocked, interrupted and resumed. They run a course, are subject to degrees of intensity and lapse during sleep. Not so are understanding, meaning and intending. But it does not follow, according to Wittgenstein, that one does not mean addition by 'plus', or that one does not intend to play chess when one sincerely says 'Let's play chess'.

Fourth, even if, *per impossibile*, meaning were a state, this would not solve the apparent problem. For how could any *state* bridge the gap, the logical gulf, between a rule and its application? What feature of a 'state of meaning' could make it right to apply the rule thus or otherwise? Is it not obvious that this hypothetical state of meaning would be tantamount to another interpretation of the rule? The jump to its application would still have to be made.

Of course, according to Wittgenstein, I may confidently say that I mean addition by 'plus', but not because I am introspectively aware of my inner state of meaning. Rather, as I am confident that I intend to play chess (and not some other game), or confident that what I now expect is John to come (and not, James to go or the pound sterling to fluctuate). If my confidence rested on an inner awareness, it would be inductive. I would have to reason that whenever I have in the past had this inner state, then I have gone on to . . . But then I ought to say 'I think I intend to play chess. Let's see!', which is absurd. With these rectifications behind us, we may resume exposition of Kripke.

The claim that there is no such thing as the 'state of meaning addition by "plus"' leads directly to the culmination of Kripke's sceptical argument. The sceptic holds, according to Kripke's view, 'that no fact about my past history, nothing that was ever in my mind, or in my external behaviour – establishes that I meant plus rather than quus'<sup>43</sup> and, in view of the introspective argument, 'it appears to follow that there was no *fact* about me that constituted my having meant plus'.<sup>44</sup> This argument, in particular its phrasing in terms of *facts*, is crucial for Kripke's interpretation. For, he claims, the target of *Investigations* §§1–133 is the truth-conditional theory of meaning as propounded in the *Tractatus*. According to that theory, what makes propositions true are corresponding facts-in-the-world (hence what would make 'I mean *W* by "*W*"' true would be some fact-in-my-mind). And what gives sentences their meaning are their correlations with possible facts or conditions in the world, viz., their truth-conditions.<sup>45</sup> The repudiation of this truth-conditional theory of meaning is the pivotal point of Wittgenstein's alleged 'Sceptical Solution' to his alleged sceptical problem. He is held to agree with the sceptic that there is no fact-in-the-world that constitutes my meaning *W* by '*W*', but also to repudiate the truth-conditional theory of meaning that requires the obtaining of such facts to make true claims about meaning.

This is off-target. It misinterprets the *Tractatus* conception of truth-conditions (*infra*). It distorts the structure of the argument of the *Investigations*. And, by Wittgenstein's lights, it is plainly wrong.

First, *no* facts are *in* the world. It is a fact that Oxford is in England, but that fact is not in England, nor yet in France – for facts are not in space. Nor are they temporal entities: the fact that Hastings was fought in 1066 did not occur in 1066, since it is Hastings – the battle – that occurred then, not the fact. The fact that it occurred in 1066 did not

cease to be a fact in 1067, nor was it a mere proto-fact in the womb of History in 1065. Hence the fact that I yesterday meant *W* by 'W' is not a fact-that-was-in-the-world-yesterday. And the fact that I now mean *W* by 'W' is not a fact-in-my-mind-now. But if I did mean *W* by 'W', then it *is* a fact that I so meant, and if I now mean *W* by 'W' then it is a fact that I so mean.

Second, if Kripke wishes, one *can* say that the fact about me that constituted my having meant addition by 'plus' is the fact that I so meant. For if I *did* so mean, it is a fact that I so meant (and I will tell you if you ask me). Of course, the stick won't move. But that is because one has got hold of the wrong end of it.

Third, to be sure, when I tell you that I meant *W* by 'W', or that I meant you to go '1002, 1004' or that I intend to visit London tomorrow, I do not read these statements off the 'facts-in-the-world'. Kripke intimates that Wittgenstein's only alternative to the 'Sceptical Solution' is a picture according to which my confidently saying what I mean must result from my reading off what I mean from a fact-in-the-world (in my mind). This is precisely what Wittgenstein denies. The picture of facts-in-the-world is a muddle. Its solution does not consist in denying that there are any facts concerning my meaning things by words, but in sorting out the muddle.

Fourth, if the repudiation of his earlier truth-conditional theory of meaning (understood as involving correspondence with facts-in-the-world) is *the* key issue in *Investigations* §§1–133 and is crucial to the solution of the sceptical paradox, it cannot but be surprising that Wittgenstein has *no* discussion of facts in the whole book. Nowhere does he examine the concept of a fact, nor suggest that it is not facts that make propositions true. Is this because he had nothing to say? Or because he was so cagy?

As a matter of fact, Wittgenstein had a very straightforward way with facts – and stated it clearly in what is now published as *Philosophical Grammar*.<sup>46</sup> That he did not incorporate these remarks into the *Investigations* strongly suggests that he was not aiming at this target at all. His moves are simple. He does not deny that what makes the proposition that *p* true is the fact that *p*. He does not repudiate the claim that the proposition determines in advance what will make it true (what fact must obtain to make it true). Rather he rejects the metaphysical picture that goes with these claims. For these are grammatical statements, not metaphysical profundities. They concern intra-lin-

guistic articulations, not the ultimate connections between language and reality. It is a convention of grammar that 'The proposition that  $p$ ' = 'the proposition that the fact that  $p$  makes true'. And so too 'The fact that  $p$ ' = 'The fact that makes the proposition that  $p$  true'. Like everything metaphysical the harmony between thought and reality is to be found *in the grammar of the language*.<sup>47</sup>

Finally, it is noteworthy that the way Kripke sets up his sceptical paradox initially parallels traditional scepticism in assuming that only entailment will license a cognitive claim. Nothing in the past or in the present, in my mind or my behaviour, *entails* that I now mean by 'plus' what I previously meant by 'plus'. And so on. This observation parallels defences of scepticism about the past, about other minds or about induction. And, of course, we need not accept any such arguments. What shows that I meant green by 'green' is the way I explained 'green', and what shows that I meant blue by 'blue' is giving a quite different explanation. That I gave such and such an explanation does not *entail* that in applying 'green' to this object I am using 'green' in accord with what I meant by it hitherto, but it provides perfectly adequate grounds for that judgment (if anyone is interested in such a bizarre question). How I use an expression, how I explain an expression, how I use the explanation as a norm of correctness (in indefinitely many cases, new and old), what I *count* as applying the expression in accord with its explanation (its meaning) shows what I understand by it. *This* sceptical problem can be side-stepped. But we may doubt whether *this* was ever Wittgenstein's problem!

## 6. KRIPKE'S SCEPTICAL SOLUTION

Initial scepticism, according to Kripke, leads us to doubt whether we are applying words in accord with how we have in the past meant them. This led, by a quick route, to conceptual nihilism that denies that there is any such thing as meaning, and faces us with a paradox: language is impossible. Wittgenstein's solution, Kripke claims, consists in rejecting a truth-conditional theory of meaning in favour of assertion-conditions. Within this framework of thought, he can accept the sceptic's premises that there is no fact-in-the-world constituting my meaning  $W$  by ' $W$ ', hence (*sic!*) that 'Jones means plus by "plus"' has no truth-conditions,<sup>48</sup> yet deny the sceptic's paradox. What he does is to describe the assertion conditions of such statements *viz.:*

*Jones* is entitled, subject to correction by others, provisionally to say, "I mean addition by 'plus'" whenever he has the feeling of confidence – "now I can go on!" – that he can give '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 . . . . *Smith* will judge *Jones* to mean addition by 'plus' only if he judges that *Jones's* answers to particular addition problems agree with those *he* is inclined to give . . .

. . . Any individual who claims to have mastered the concept of addition will be judged by the community to have done so if his particular responses agree with those of the community in enough cases . . .<sup>49</sup>

It is difficult here to find any similitude to Wittgenstein's arguments. Indeed, it is difficult to see *any* plausibility in the argument, irrespective of whether it is Wittgenstein's.

We are asked to accept as plausible the following exchange: we ask *Jones* 'Do you mean addition by "plus" (or red by "red", bachelor by "bachelor" etc.)?' And he is then supposed to answer: 'Yes, I do, and I know that I do because I feel confident I can answer such questions as "What is  $68 + 57$ ?" correctly (or "What colour is this?", or "Is John a bachelor?").' But this is bizarre. That one feels confident is not what *entitles* one to say that one means *W* by '*W*'. And that one is *inclined* to answer thus and so is not what *entitles* one to judge one's answer to be correct.<sup>50</sup>

First, other things being equal, I will *always* claim to mean *W* by '*W*'. The question is *what* I mean by '*W*', i.e., whether I actually understand this word, whether I know what it means. The issue is not whether I am now using it in accord with what I previously meant by it, but whether I am now using it in accord with its meaning. The answer to these various questions is *not* to insist on my confidence, but to say what I mean, i.e., to explain what '*W*' means, e.g., that, 'bachelor' means an unmarried male, 'red' means this colour (pointing at a ripe tomato), and 'plus' means that function which when 2 and 3 are its arguments, yields 5 as its value, and which, when . . . . Of course, these explanations do not bridge the gap between meaning and use, rule and application. But no explanation of any kind could do that, since the 'gap' is categorial. But giving these explanations *does, ceteris paribus*, provide adequate grounds for judging what a person means, and whether he knows what an expression means.

Second, the very idea that I could have an *entitlement* to say 'I mean *W* by "*W*"' is odd. For it suggests that there are grounds, assertability



conditions, the obtaining of which I must establish before I may say that I mean such and such. But there are no more grounds for *my* saying 'I mean *W* by "*W*"' than there are grounds, assertability conditions, for saying 'I intend to go to London tomorrow' or 'I want a drink'. So too, it is misleading to suggest that there is here a question of my *knowing* that I mean *W* by "*W*" (viz., if I have a title to assert, then *ceteris paribus*, I know . . .). But 'I know that I mean *W* by "*W*"' is just an emphatic insistence that I do mean *W* by "*W*".

Kripke's description of the assertion-conditions for a third-person ascription is no less strange. We must imagine the following exchange: we ask Smith 'Does Jones mean addition by "plus"?' He replies, "Yes, because whenever he is asked "What are *a* plus *b*" (for any *a* and *b*), he always gives the same answer as I give'. This is awry.

First, whether Jones gives the same answer as Smith is beside the point. The question is whether he gives the correct answer,<sup>51</sup> i.e., what *counts*, in such a case, as the correct answer. In some cases, even this procedure would be absurd. For example, does Jones mean bachelor by 'bachelor'? Are we to say: 'Yes, whenever he is asked whether Mr. A is a bachelor he gives the same answer I am inclined to give'? But in most cases the answer I would be inclined to give would be 'I don't know!' Would this response satisfy the assertion conditions for 'Jones means bachelor by "bachelor"'?

Second, the analysis seems to suggest that Smith cannot judge that Jones understands '*W*' (means *W* by '*W*') unless (a) he knows how Jones applies '*W*' to new instances, and (b) he takes a given application of '*W*' to be correct simply because it is the one he himself is inclined to give. But it is a conceptual truth that I am entitled to judge someone to mean *W* by '*W*' (to understand '*W*') on the grounds of the *explanations* of '*W*' he gives? If he says 'By "bachelor" I mean an unmarried male', is that not *enough*? *Must* he answer the question of whether Genghis Khan at the age of 22 was a bachelor? And must he answer it the way I am inclined to?<sup>52</sup>

Putting together the first and third person assertion-conditions as a general account, two points still stand forth as baffling.

First, truth-conditions were meant to provide an account of the meanings of sentences. Giving the truth-conditions is generally supposed to be a way of giving or explaining the meaning of a sentence. Assertion conditions are presumably to inherit this role from truth-conditions in Kripke's account. So the *meaning* of 'A means addition

(or whatever) by “plus” (or whatever)’ is supposed to be *given* by Kripke’s specification of its assertion conditions. But would *anyone* thus explain to someone who genuinely wanted to know what ‘A means W by “W”’ means? And would such an explanation provide a norm for the correct use of ‘means’?

Second, has the original sceptical question really been answered? The problem was set up by arguing that we can never have adequate *grounds* to judge that anyone now uses an expression in accord with its previous meaning (with what he, or we, previously meant by it). The sceptical solution is that no fact about past or present can tell us that our current use coheres with our past use. But if we all share common inclinations to apply the term thus-and-so, then we all now mean W by ‘W’, or, more carefully, as long as a speaker does *not* apply ‘W’ differently from the way the rest of the community is inclined to apply it, then he will be accepted as following the rule for ‘W’, as meaning by ‘W’ what everyone else means.

But does this really resolve the sceptical question? Given that no one previously ever added 57 and 68, how do we know that our present community-wide inclination to answer ‘125’ accords with what we previously meant by ‘plus’, i.e., with what we would have been inclined to say, had we previously been asked what 57 + 68 is? Like Kripke, we put the challenge ‘in terms of a sceptical hypothesis about a change in [our] usage’.<sup>53</sup> For there was yesterday no *satisfied* assertion condition for our meaning either plus or quus, since we had no inclination to answer ‘57 + 68’ either way, as the question, *ex hypothesi*, had never occurred to anyone hitherto.

#### 7. ROBINSON CRUSOE RIDES AGAIN

Kripke’s assertion conditions account is part of his picture of Wittgenstein’s argument, but not the whole. In addition, he contends, Wittgenstein describes the role and utility in our lives of assertions that someone means such-and-such by his words, or that his present use of a word accords with what he previously meant by it. It turns out, however, that this role and the conditions of assertion, are inapplicable to a single person considered in isolation.<sup>54</sup> If one person is considered in isolation, the notion of his following a rule can have *no* substantive content. For as long as we regard him as following a rule ‘privately’, i.e., merely following his inclinations (sic!), then there is no difference

between his thinking he is following a rule and his following one. It is *this* argument which, by §202, rules out as incoherent the private language which is introduced only in §§243 ff.

What then of Robinson Crusoe on his desert island? It does *not* follow, Kripke claims, that he cannot be said to follow rules. 'What does follow is that *if* we think of Crusoe as following rules, we are taking him into our community and applying our criteria for rule-following to him. The falsity of the private model need not mean that a *physically isolated* individual cannot be said to follow rules; rather that an individual *considered in isolation* (whether or not he is physically isolated) cannot be said to do so.'<sup>55</sup>

This is muddled. In the first place, it is quite wrong to suppose that distinctions between appearance and reality are inapplicable to an individual in isolation, and are ones which that individual cannot employ. In the particular case of rule-following, there is no reason why Crusoe should not follow a pattern or paradigm, making occasional mistakes perhaps, and occasionally (but maybe not always) noticing and correcting his mistakes. That he is following a rule will show itself in the manner in which he uses the formulation of the rule as a canon or norm of correctness. Hence, to take a simple example, he might use the pattern --- ··· --- ··· as a rule or pattern to follow in decorating the walls of his house; when he notices four dots in a sequence he manifests annoyance with himself. He carefully goes back and rubs one out, and perhaps checks carefully adjacent marks, comparing them with his 'master-pattern'. And so on. Of course, he is *not* merely following his 'inclinations',<sup>56</sup> but rather following the rule. And it is his behaviour, including his corrective behaviour, which shows both that he is following the rule, and *what he counts as following the rule*.

It might be asked how an unseen observer of such solitary rule-following could distinguish Crusoe's making a mistake from his following a more complex pattern, and his following a more complex pattern from his non-normative behaviour. How could one justify the claim that the solitary man is either following or breaking a rule at all? The answer is that if one must, *ex hypothesi*, remain unseen, it will be very difficult to understand him. If the rules are simple, we might guess aright. If they are complex, we might not. Reflect that if we observed the self-addressed speech of a shipwrecked monolingual Tibetan, our chances of coming to understand him are remote. But he surely could talk to himself, keep a diary, give orders to himself, play Tibetan

solitaire. Once the restriction of *unseen* observation is lifted, however, matters change altogether. Gestures ('the natural language of mankind' as Augustine says), common human nature, and *interaction with* the castaway provide the necessary leverage. Of course, to understand him we must grasp his rules. Whether we are succeeding in doing so is something we shall see from the extent to which *our* attempts to follow *his* rules are in agreement with his behaviour. But whether he is following a rule is independent of whether anyone else is actually doing so too.

Second, Kripke rightly concedes that Crusoe may follow rules, but insists that in saying of him that he does, we 'are taking him into our community and applying our criteria for rule-following to him'. This seems confused. This 'taking him into our community' will do little to alleviate Crusoe's solitude. What is it supposed to mean? Does it mean that in saying that he is following a rule we are applying our criteria for rule-following to him? Well – are there other criteria? This, presumably, is what 'rule following' *means*. When we say of the cat that it is hunting the mouse, we are applying our criteria of hunting to it. Do we thereby take the cat into our community? This, it might be replied, is beside the point. Our 'taking Crusoe into our community' consists in the fact that we judge that he is following a rule only if he satisfies the assertion conditions of following a rule, and *these*, Kripke contends, stipulate that *A* can be said to mean *W* by '*W*', to follow such-and-such a rule, if he applies the rule (uses '*W*') as other members of the community do, if his responses and inclinations agree with theirs. Since Crusoe is not a member of any community, in judging him to be following a rule, we must be 'taking him into our community', judging his responses to agree with ours.

Must we? Must Crusoe's rules be the same as ours? Must his colour vocabulary be isomorphic with ours? Could he not invent new rules, play new games? To be sure, in order to *grasp* them, we must understand what counts, in Crusoe's *practice*, as following the rules. And that must be evident in Crusoe's *activities*. But that is not the same as checking to see whether his responses agree with ours, let alone a matter of 'taking him into our community'. And our judgment that he is following his rules is quite independent of any judgment about how most members of the English Speaking Peoples would react. Indeed, given Kripke's rule-scepticism, how are we supposed to *know* how our community *would* react, given that the rule is novel, or is being applied

to a novel circumstance?

Interestingly, Wittgenstein did explicitly discuss Robinson Crusoe in his notebooks. In MS 124, p. 213 we find an early version of *Investigations* §243(a), a discussion of the imaginary monologists, whose language is translatable by the explorer. Couldn't we imagine people who speak only to themselves? In that case, Wittgenstein responds, each person could have his own language. There could be men who know only language games that one plays by oneself, viz., ordering oneself, telling oneself, asking and answering oneself, etc. How they learnt their language is here irrelevant, he adds. An explorer who observed the behaviour of such monologists could translate their languages. On p. 221 Wittgenstein remarks that the private language that he has described above is one which Robinson could have spoken to himself on his island. If anyone had observed him, he could have learnt this language. For the meanings of the words of this (contingently) private language are shown in Robinson's *behaviour*.<sup>57</sup>

There is no hint here that in attributing rule-following to Crusoe, in judging him to mean such and such by what he says, we are 'taking him into our community'. There is no suggestion that our concept of rule-following or of meaning is limited to *our* rules, or to what *we* mean by signs. There is no claim that his responses must agree with ours (he may have invented a new branch of mathematics; he may employ a different colour geometry from ours; or he may apply names of notes immediately, given that he has perfect pitch). The claim does not involve insistence on community-aid for solitary rule-followers, but on *regularities* of action of sufficient *complexity* to yield normativity. The criteria for whether Crusoe is following a rule do indeed lie in his behaviour, but not in his behaviour agreeing with independent hypothetical or counterfactual behaviour of ours.

It is noteworthy that immediately following the remark about Crusoe on p. 221 of MS 124, Wittgenstein introduces the real private language argument, i.e., a draft of *Investigations* §243(b). There is no hint that he considers such a language to have been ruled out by his antecedent reflections on rule-following in general or on Crusoe's solitary rule-following in particular.

#### 8. FURTHER DIAGNOSIS

The discussion thus far suggests that Kripke has misinterpreted Witt-

genstein's argument 'in the Large and in the Small'. Three substantial misunderstandings or distortions ramify throughout his essay. These are likely to mislead readers and to lead to futile debates about Wittgenstein's intentions. The following observations may help to avoid this.

(i) Kripke sets up his sceptical problem (the 'real private language argument') in terms of what a speaker means by an expression, of whether he is now using an expression in accord with what he previously meant by it. This is a highly misleading way of broaching the core problem Wittgenstein is concerned with, namely, what is involved in a speaker understanding an expression, knowing what it means, using it in accord with a correct explanation of its meaning. Kripke's strategy is misleading because it runs together the internally related, but distinct, notions of what an expression means and understanding an expression. Focussing on the issue of conformity of current use with a pattern of past use conflates the question of the persistence of understanding (an ability) with the question of the correctness of the present use (conformity with a norm). Kripke vainly attempts to extricate himself from the consequent muddle by invoking community aid. Wittgenstein's strategy is entirely different. He is careful to keep these questions distinct. He correlates understanding both with the use of an expression and with explaining its meaning, and he stresses that these correlations must not be conflated. Since meaning is a correlate of understanding, the meaning of a word is also linked both with its use and with explanations of its meaning. The meaning of a word *is* what is explained by an explanation of its meaning. And it is also the manner in which the word is used in speech. Understanding the meaning of a word is akin to an ability; it is the mastery of a technique of using a symbol according to rules. The criteria of understanding lie in behaviour, in the use of the expression in accord with (in what *counts* as accord with) its explanation, the rules for its use, and in the giving of correct explanations of its meaning (which may be by example, paraphrase, contextual paraphrase, ostension, *Merkmal*-definition, etc.). Not only agreement in judgments, as Kripke suggests, but also agreement in definitions is essential to meaning and understanding – and the notions must be described with sufficient subtlety that logic is not thereby abolished. It is unclear whether Kripke satisfies this obvious requirement. On p. 297 he insists, following Wittgenstein, that truth is not to be equated with what most people hold to be true. He insists that Wittgenstein has no theory

of truth-conditions, necessary and sufficient conditions for the correctness of one response rather than another to a new addition problem (and, presumably, to a new colour predication). Wittgenstein's assertability conditions story, according to Kripke, does not say that the correct answer to an addition problem is the one everyone gives, but only the platitude that if everyone agrees upon a certain answer, then no one will feel justified in calling that answer wrong. But *is* the answer right? What does it *mean*, according to this story, for an answer to be right as opposed to wrong? Unless an answer *is* forthcoming, Kripke's Wittgenstein, unlike the author of the *Philosophical Investigations*, will have abolished logic!

(ii) The role of *agreement* is certainly paramount in Wittgenstein's argument. My use of an expression must agree, accord, with my correct explanation of what it means. If I explain 'red' by pointing at a sample, saying 'This is red', then when I judge an object *A* to be red, *A* must be *this* (pointing at the sample) colour. Moreover, *ceteris paribus*, my current use of an expression must agree with my previous use. I must lay down the yardstick alongside reality *in the same way*, i.e., in what is called 'the same way' from occasion to occasion. And reality must be sufficiently stable so that the yardstick typically gives the same result when the same object is measured on successive occasions. Otherwise measurement in particular and the application of concepts to reality in general become pointless. Finally, the 'language-games' I engage in with others can be played only if we agree in explanations (definitions) and also, by and large, agree in applications (judgments).

Kripke appreciates the centrality of the notion of agreement for Wittgenstein, but distorts its function. We noted that he allots no significant role to agreement in definitions (explanations) and has nothing to say on the relationship between agreement in judgments and agreement in definitions. However, it also seems to be the case that Kripke's Wittgenstein conceives of agreement as *constitutive* of my meaning *W* by '*W*'. Someone is judged by the community to have mastered such-and-such a concept 'if his particular responses agree with those of the community in enough cases'.<sup>58</sup> Someone in a community is said to follow a rule 'as long as he agrees in his responses with the . . . responses produced by members of *that* community'.<sup>59</sup> On this account agreement with a community is part of the assertion-conditions of 'meaning *W* by "*W*"' and hence part of its meaning. Is this Wittgenstein's view?

For Wittgenstein, agreement is a framework condition for the existence of language-games, but is *not* constitutive of any game. Hence it is not part of the criteria for whether *A* *understands* 'plus' or 'red'. These are, rather, that *A* explains correctly what the expressions mean, and typically uses them correctly. That *A* understands what 'red' means is shown by his giving a correct explanation (ostensive definition) of 'red', as well as by his saying of my red rose 'That is red'. That others would also characterize my rose as red is not part of the criteria for *A*'s understanding, knowing the meaning of 'red'. But the *framework* for these concept-exercising activities is general agreement.<sup>60</sup> Similarly, Wittgenstein contends that proofs in mathematics stand in need of ratification, and in the absence of a consensus in ratifications, mathematicians would not come to any understanding, and the concept of calculation would have no application.<sup>61</sup> But this is not to say that it is agreement in ratification that *makes* such and such operations calculation. Far from it, 'the agreement of ratifications is the precondition of our language-game, it is not affirmed in it'. The subject of agreement in judgments and definitions is treated by Wittgenstein with great subtlety. We shall not try here to unravel its complexities. But it is clear that he does not conceive of agreement in judgments as a constitutive element of a language-game.

Kripke does not take sufficiently seriously Wittgenstein's insistence that 'Following according to the rule is **FUNDAMENTAL** to our language-game. It characterizes what we call description'.<sup>62</sup> He apparently wants to go *behind* rule-following to agreement. But there is nothing behind:

It is no use, for example, going back to the concept of agreement, because it is no more certain that one proceeding is in agreement with another, than that it has happened in accordance with a rule. Admittedly, going according to a rule is also founded on agreement.<sup>63</sup>

It is not surprising that if one tries to go beyond rule-following into the framework that makes it possible, one will, in the process, lose the very concept of normativity one is trying to clarify; and with it too the distinction between correct and incorrect.

What a teacher teaches a child is not to have the same inclinations others have, but to follow a rule correctly. The learner must learn to use the rule, the explanation of meaning, as a standard of correct use. He must learn to see such and such results as criteria for following the rule



correctly. And all this takes place within the background context of a practice of using the rule in this way. If the learner is to master shared concepts he must learn what *counts* as following the rule. And

what the correct following of a rule consists in cannot be described *more closely* than by describing the *learning* of 'proceeding according to the rule'. And this description is an everyday one, like that of cooking and sewing, for example.<sup>64</sup>

What counts as correct is not the response we are inclined to give. The learner is *not* entitled to 'judge a new response to be "correct" simply because it is the response he is inclined to give' (and others agree). It is correct if it accords with the rule. But we can only speak of accord with a rule in the context of a regular use of a rule as a measure of correctness.

(iii) It has become fashionable in the last decade, under the influence of Michael Dummett, to view the evolution of Wittgenstein's philosophies as a transformation of a realist into an anti-realist, a truth-conditional theory into an assertability-conditions theory. This has been an unfortunate influence, forcing Wittgenstein into a Procrustean bed, rather than looking carefully to see what he says. Kripke, like others,<sup>65</sup> falls victim to this distorted way of looking at Wittgenstein. Distortions occur at two levels: (a) the representation of Wittgenstein's truth-conditional theory in the *Tractatus*; (b) the picture of Wittgenstein's later views on meaning. We shall limit ourselves to some schematic observations.<sup>66</sup>

Kripke characterizes the *Tractatus* with the following thumb-nail sketch:

The simplest, most basic idea of the *Tractatus* can hardly be dismissed: 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. For example, "the cat is on the mat" is understood by those speakers who realize that it is true if and only if a certain cat is on a certain mat; it is false otherwise. The presence of the cat on the mat is a fact or condition-in-the-world that would make the sentence true (express a truth) if it obtained.<sup>67</sup>

Even allowing for the vagaries of sketches, this conflates three distinct doctrines of the *Tractatus*. First, there is a pictorial theory of the atomic proposition. The sense of such a proposition is a function of the meanings of its constituent unanalysable names, and it consists in its depiction of an atomic state of affairs (which may, or may not, obtain). Second, there is a truth-conditional account of the sense of molecular propositions. Third, there is a correspondence theory of truth. Kripke

treats the *Tractatus* truth-conditional theory as if it were part of the pictorial theory of the atomic proposition. But according to the *Tractatus* it literally makes no sense to talk of the truth-conditions of an atomic proposition. The truth-conditions of a proposition are the conditions under which '*T*' occurs in the final column of its truth-table. But there is no such thing as a truth-table for the atomic proposition '*p*'. Similarly, Kripke apparently reads Tarski's *T*-sentences into the *Tractatus* (viz., '*F(a)*' is true if and only if *F(a)*). But this is *not* part of the *Tractatus* theory of meaning. If *T*-sentences such as "The cat is on the mat" is true if and only if a certain cat is on a certain mat' are what spell out truth-conditions, then the truth-conditional theory parts company with the picture theory of the proposition, the thesis of isomorphism, the bipolarity of the proposition and the distinctive (ineffable) *Tractatus* form of the correspondence theory of truth.

Does this matter? Is it not, after all, just so much history? It does indeed. For by thus misrepresenting history we facilitate the fit of the distorting spectacles that allow us to delude ourselves into viewing the evolution of twentieth-century philosophy of language (philosophical logic) as a progressive confrontation between truth-conditional semantics and assertion-conditions semantics.

Kripke contends that the later Wittgenstein 'proposes a picture of language based, not on truth-conditions, but on assertability conditions or justification conditions.'<sup>68</sup> It is very doubtful whether this picture of Wittgenstein's later views on language does anything but distort the reality it is meant to represent. It is true that for some kinds of sentences, in particular third-person sentences concerning psychological characteristics and sentences about abilities, we explain their meaning in part by specifying the kinds of circumstance that justify their assertion. But it would be absurd, as well as groundless, to foist on Wittgenstein the view that the meaning of every sentence is given thus. Kripke, to be sure, acknowledges that non-declaratives do not fit into this picture, and avowals of sensation do not either. But the 'exceptions' are not just these. It is not merely avowals of aches and pains that do not fit this mould, but saying that I intend to do so and so, remember this or that, want such and such. It is not merely psychological predications in the first-person that mar the alleged pattern, but hosts of ordinary utterances, such as 'The rose is red', 'The table is round', 'It is warm today', 'My name is N.N.', 'It is time to go', in short, most sentences. Wittgenstein does *not* claim, with respect to sentences in general, that we explain their meaning by giving their assertion conditions. The

injunction to *look* at how sentences are used is not an implicit claim that all sentences have assertion conditions. What explanations would we give that would *justify* asserting such sentences as those cited, and *also constitute explanations of their meaning?* (But there is no difficulty in explaining what 'My name is N.N.' or 'It is time to go' or 'The rose is red' mean!)

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, 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 that 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.

#### 9. A CONCLUDING SKETCH

We have tried to show that Wittgenstein's argument as it struck Kripke is very far removed from Wittgenstein's argument. We have denied that Wittgenstein is concerned with a sceptical problem, and denied that he gives a Humean solution to the problems he was concerned with. To give a proper account of Wittgenstein's discussion of rule-following and its relation to the private language argument would be a large task, which we shall confront in another forum.<sup>69</sup> But perhaps the following sketch may be helpful to a reader who, weary of the flow of denials, hankers for some positive suggestions about Wittgenstein's discussion of rule-following prior to §243.

The conception of meaning that Wittgenstein delineated in the *Tractatus* involved a commitment to various metaphysical doctrines. In particular, fully analysed names were conceived as standing for simple entities in reality which were their meanings. These 'objects' were metaphysical simples, the indestructible substance of reality. The combinatorial possibilities of simple names in a language must mirror the metaphysical combinatorial possibilities of objects in reality. Wittgenstein later referred to this conception as the 'Bedeutungskörper' (meaning-body) picture. When he returned to philosophy in 1929, the first element of his old way of thinking that he jettisoned was precisely

the *Bedeutungskörper* picture. What he argued initially was that instead of conceiving of language as a system of (analysable) signs, connected by means of lines of projection with metaphysical simples that provide the signs with meanings, we should conceive of language simply as a calculus of rules. The meaning of an expression is not a sempiternal simple object,<sup>70</sup> but the rules for its use, the totality of which fix its place in a calculus of meaning rules.

Under pressure, this picture too gave way. It gave way, not because a language is not rule-governed, nor because speaking is not a normative activity, but because it involved a mystification of rules no less distorting than the original metaphysics of objects that the normative, calculus conception was meant to replace. Rules for the use of expressions are not bits of normative machinery. They are not Platonic entities whirring away in Fregean third realms, nor are they psychological entities determining in a causal manner how we are constrained to think. Two deep and ramifying confusions must be extirpated.

It is very tempting to conceive of a sign as standing in a projective relation to what it represents. This conception may be variously realized. Frege conceived the *senses* associated with words as determining a reference. The *Tractatus* conceived of the proposition as a logical picture representing a state of affairs. The representing picture, the proposition, was held to include the pictorial relationship, 'the correlations of the picture's elements with things' (*Tractatus* 2.1514). *In a like manner*, if one conceives of the meaning of an expression as constituted by the rules for its use, one may think that *the rule* must, in some sense, contain a 'picture' or 'representation' of what complies with it. For understanding an expression must constitute knowing, grasping, the rules that constitute its meaning. Those rules stipulate how the expression is to be used. So by grasping the rules one must grasp how to use, how to apply the expression. But that would only be possible, it seems, if the rule determines independently of us what accords with it. Otherwise how could I, by grasping the rule, know what to do with the expression the meaning of which is given by the rule. (Precisely analogous is the thought that an intention, expectation, or order must contain a 'picture' of its fulfilment.)

One of Wittgenstein's central concerns is to combat this conception. We must sharply distinguish the lines of projection from the technique or method of projection. The method of projection is not part of the

symbol. Of course, one can describe the method of projection (the application of a symbol). But such a description is itself just another symbol (an interpretation). If the method of application is a bridge between a symbol and what it symbolizes, it is at any rate not built until the application is made. It is not the interpretation that builds the bridge between the sign and what is signified or meant, only the practice does that.<sup>71</sup> It is not rules, *of their own accord*, that determine meanings, it is the way in which we, in our activities, use rules, that does so. It is not rules that breathe life into signs, but our using the signs in accord with rules, in what we *call* 'accord'. And that is not fixed (magically) by the rule all on its own, by its containing a picture of what accords with it and what does not. It is fixed by our practices of using the rule (the explanation of meaning) to constitute a norm of correctness, our practices of teaching and explaining, of criticising and correcting, of justifying our applications of an expression by reference to the rule.

A second great confusion is closely connected with the first. We are inclined to think that it is the mind that infuses symbols with their meaning. And when we realize that there is indeed a gap between an explanation of the meaning of an expression and the use of the expression, it is altogether natural to think that it is the mind that bridges that gap, that effects the connection between a rule and its application. This can be variously conceived. Frege thought of a sense as an abstract entity which determines a referent, or presents a referent in a certain way. Grasping a sense, he thought of as an altogether mysterious<sup>72</sup> mental act of coming into contact with such entities. Indeed, it would not be unlike imagining a sign *together with its lines of projection* (compare *Investigations* §141) save that a sense, being an abstract object, is not imaginable. In the *Tractatus* meaning is conferred on signs by the will, the 'metaphysical self' that thinks the method or projection in thinking of the sense of the proposition (*Tractatus* 3.11). The wayward antagonist in *Investigations* §§184–243 conceives of the mind as 'drawing the projection lines' from the symbol, or from the rule which explains its use, to its application. This is held to be done by mental acts or processes of understanding, or by acts of meaning (e.g., addition by 'plus') or by intuitive insight, or by feelings of intimation which arise from contemplating the rule.

Pricking the bubble of these philosophical flights of fancy is one of the tasks Wittgenstein undertakes in the *Investigations*' discussion of rule-following. One by one he examines these false pictures of under-

standing and of rules, and shows that they constitute a mythology of symbolism. He does not deny that we can and often do 'grasp the whole use of a word at a stroke', nor that when we order someone to expand the series '+2' we mean him to go on '20004, 20006'. We can and do explain how a given rule is to be followed, and we can and do learn how to follow rules correctly (independently of intuitions, intimations and causal necessitations). But these mundane phenomena must be seen aright, not allowed to evolve into mysteries about mental acts of understanding and logical machinery of rules. It is *acting* according to a rule, a *practice* of normative behaviour, that lies at the bottom of our language-games. Language, far from being a reflection of thought, is a form of behaviour. It is no coincidence that Wittgenstein often quoted the line from Goethe: *Im Anfang war die Tat*.

Kripke contends that Wittgenstein 'has invented a new form of scepticism', that 'it is important to see that his achievement in posing this problem stands on its own, independently of the value of his own solution of it and the resultant argument against private language'.<sup>73</sup> This observation not only misrepresents the character of Wittgenstein's preoccupations and achievements, but also fails to appreciate the diminishing significance of scepticism in philosophy. Philosophical scepticism played a significant role in seventeenth-century culture, stimulated in part by the deep need for a criterion of truth within religion (given the schism within Christianity), for a criterion of truth for scientific theories (given the number of competing scientific theories, e.g., of the solar system, all equally reliable within acceptable margins of error), and for a criterion of truth between science and religion. But perhaps the most important impetus was the manifest conflict between the new scientific picture of reality (as consisting of material objects possessing only geometric and mechanical properties, and powers to affect our sensibility in such and such colourful ways) and our ordinary conception of the world. No one could gainsay the colossal achievements of the new science, but it opened a gulf between appearance and reality that required explanation and justification. For if the world as it is in itself is so different from the world as it appears to be, how can we be certain that we can ever know anything about it as it really is? In this cultural context it was altogether natural that philosophy should become preoccupied with justifying the ways of God (and His world) in the face of sceptical doubts.

Those days are long past. Scepticism, in the twentieth century, is no

longer a *serious* issue in our culture (save perhaps in the domains of ethics and aesthetics). One may *use* scepticism as a colourful device to present a genuine problem. But this manoeuvre is no more than heuristic. Achievement in philosophy today *could not* consist in inventing new forms of scepticism. The deepest cultural preoccupations of this century turn on issues concerning language and communication. These ramify through literature and art (from von Hoffmannsthal and Joyce to Orwell, Borges, Beckett or Pinter as well as such artists as Picasso, de Chirico and Magritte, Steinberg and Escher), through the 'humane studies', psychology, linguistics and sociology. It is not surprising that philosophy has followed suit, not like the owl of Minerva, but in fruitful symbiotic relationship with the rest of our culture. Wittgenstein's *central* concerns,<sup>74</sup> in both his philosophies, were with the nature of language, its function and structure (cf. *Investigations* §92), and the myriad philosophical illusions propensity to which is the unavoidable condition of every language user. It is here, and not in the *invention* of new forms of scepticism, that his achievements lie. His reflections on rule-following not only undermine a conception of language rampant in philosophy, theoretical linguistics, and psychology, but also yield a novel and more profound conception of logical and mathematical necessity than any yet achieved by philosophers. His private language argument, the *real* private language argument, not only undermines a tradition of philosophical thought running from Descartes to the present day, but yields novel and more profound conceptions of self-consciousness, of the relation of mind to body, and of the will than any available hitherto. What exactly his conception was needs exposition, which we have not offered save *en passant*. Whether his conception was right needs argument, which we have not given, save *per accidens*. What we have done is to show that it does not lie in the arid area of sceptical questions, let alone of Humean sceptical solutions.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> S. Kripke, 'Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language', in I. Block (ed.), *Perspectives on the Philosophy of Wittgenstein*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1982. Since we wrote this paper, Kripke's essay has been slightly modified, extended by a postscript on other minds, and published independently. All references here are to the original essay.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 241.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 242.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 296.

<sup>5</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Notebooks 1914–16*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1969, p. 44.

<sup>6</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1969, p. 65.

<sup>7</sup> Kripke, 'Rules and Private Language', p. 268.

<sup>8</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* I-iv-2.

<sup>9</sup> David Hume, 'Abstract of Treatise of Human Nature'. Cf. *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* I-v-i, I-xii-2.

<sup>10</sup> "Nature has not left this [belief] to his [the sceptic's] choice, and has doubtless esteem'd it an affair of too great importance to be trusted to our uncertain reasonings and speculations" *Treatise* I-iv-2.

<sup>11</sup> See A. Ambrose (ed.), Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Lectures Cambridge 1932–35*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1979, p. 97; also C. Diamond (ed.), Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Lectures on the Foundations of Mathematics, Cambridge, 1939*, Harvester Press, Sussex, 1976, p. 103.

<sup>12</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1953, §128. Hereafter referred to as *PI*.

<sup>13</sup> Kripke, 'Rules and Private Language', p. 273; 'quus' is a function defined by:  $x \oplus y = x + y$  if  $x, y < 57$ , otherwise  $x \oplus y = 5$ . This is Kripke's operative example of the paradox involved in rule-following.

<sup>14</sup> Wittgenstein, *PI*, §187.

<sup>15</sup> Kripke, 'Rules and Private Language', p. 239.

<sup>16</sup> For the detailed account of this complex bibliographical history, see G. H. von Wright, 'The Origin and Composition of the *Philosophical Investigations*' in his *Wittgenstein*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1982, pp. 111ff.

<sup>17</sup> The missing remarks, inserted only in the final draft, are: §§247–52, 257, 262–69, 292, 294, 297, 299–301.

<sup>18</sup> This explanation derives from MS 180(a), 68 f.

<sup>19</sup> Or indeed to effect the transition from seeing that it is *this* to seeing that it is red! And what *is* the *this* which this is?

<sup>20</sup> In MS 180(a), 72, the passage began: 'I was (earlier) in the difficulty that a rule could not determine any action, since anything can be brought into accord with the rule.' There *PI* §198 occurs on page 1.

<sup>21</sup> This leads to a vicious infinite regress, as Wittgenstein repeatedly noted. No interpretation would be complete without a rider, i.e. there would be a need for explanations of the terms used in formulating the interpretation, a need for further explanations of the terms used in giving these explanations, etc.

<sup>22</sup> It is, however, noteworthy that in MS 180(a), 72 an alternative drafting to 'And so there would be neither accord nor conflict here' was (translated) 'And so "accord" and "conflict" here lose their sense altogether', which does not imply a paradox leading to the conclusion that language is impossible, but implies a misunderstanding of what counts as acting in accord with a rule and what as acting contrary to one. And what goes for MS 180(a) goes for the final version too!

<sup>23</sup> For detailed analysis of *PI* §§143–184, see G. P. Baker and P. M. S. Hacker, *Wittgenstein: Understanding and Meaning*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1980, pp. 621ff.

<sup>24</sup> Given that Wittgenstein's discussion of reading intentionally runs parallel to his analysis of meaning and understanding, it should seem puzzling to Kripke that Witt-



genstein did not introduce a 'new paradox of reading' viz., that since reading is not just mouthing words while looking at writing, nor is it any mental accompaniment, therefore there is no 'fact' that constitutes my reading. Therefore, paradoxically, dear reader, reading is logically impossible!

<sup>25</sup> Although not consistently with the meaning of the expression (e.g., 'plus') nor with what we understand by it. But that is just what is in question – what does determine meaning?

<sup>26</sup> Our translation. The German reads: "Dadurch zeigen wir nämlich, dass es eine Auffassung einer Regel gibt, die *nicht* eine Deutung ist;" there seems no license for the translation "there is a way of grasping (*Erfassen*) a rule". And "von Fall zu Fall der Anwendung" seems unhappily rendered by "in actual cases".

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* (3rd. ed.) Blackwell, Oxford, 1978, p. 410.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 335.

<sup>29</sup> It is important to note that Wittgenstein countenances the logical possibility of creatures being born with the ability to speak a language (cf. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Grammar*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1974, p. 188; and *The Blue and Brown Books*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1964, p. 12). How one learnt or acquired a language is irrelevant to an account of *what* one has learnt. So if one could be born speaking German, would the absence of speakers of Etruscan be a logical barrier to being born speaking Etruscan? Since Robinson Crusoe could talk to himself, keep a diary, follow rules, would he cease to be able to do so if, unbeknownst to him, the rest of mankind were destroyed by a plague? Obviously not. Is his continuing to be able to do so dependent on the history of his acquisition of his linguistic skills? That seems inconsistent with the principle that 'Teaching as the hypothetical history of our subsequent actions . . . drops out of our considerations' (*Blue Book*, p. 14).

In MS 165 Wittgenstein imagines a solitary cave-man who uses a picture-language on the walls of his cave. Such a language, he says, would be readily intelligible. Later he imagines a solitary caveman who speaks only to himself, gives himself orders, etc. Provided he uses simple signs which we could interpret, we could come to understand him. A few pages further on Wittgenstein concludes that to describe the language of a people is to describe a regularity of their behaviour, and to describe a language which someone speaks only to himself is to describe a regularity of *his* behaviour, and not something which can happen only once (cf. MS 129, 89).

Of course, we could not *understand* another's language unless we could grasp the rules of his language, follow them as he does, agree with him in the manner of applying them.

<sup>30</sup> Kripke, 'Rules and Private Language', p. 277.

<sup>31</sup> Kripke, 'Rules and Private Language', p. 248.

<sup>32</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, 'Notes for Lectures on "Private Experience" and "Sense Data"', *Philosophical Review* 77, 1968, 300: "The solipsist flutters and flutters in the flyglass, strikes against the walls, flutters further. How can he be brought to rest?" Note that in MS 165 Wittgenstein states explicitly that the discussion of a private language *concerns the problems of idealism and solipsism*.

<sup>33</sup> Wittgenstein, 'Notes for Lectures on "Private Experience" and "Sense Data"', p. 314. 'The private experience is to serve as a paradigm, and at the same time admittedly it can't be a paradigm.

The “private experience” is a degenerate construction of our grammar (comparable in a sense to tautology and contradiction). And this grammatical monster now fools us; when we wish to do away with it, it seems as though we denied the existence of an experience, say, toothache.’

<sup>34</sup> Americans prefer the terminology of the computer age – so: given that we are all ‘wired-up in the same way’!

<sup>35</sup> Kripke, ‘Rules and Private Language’, p. 286. In effect Kripke’s interpretation of §202 assigns a meaning to the word ‘privately’ which is at odds with Wittgenstein’s use of the term. Kripke holds that someone would follow a rule ‘privately’ if his actions are considered in isolation from the behaviour of his community in respect of responses to this rule. But on Wittgenstein’s account it is essential that the putative rule allegedly being followed ‘privately’ is one to the *expression* of which only *I* have access, i.e., it is expressed by a private ostensive definition. Hence it is, for a quite different reason from Kripke’s, *impossible* for another to ascertain whether or not my applications of this ‘rule’ are correct. Kripke’s objection to private ostensive definitions must be that the attempt to apply any such rule must leave the agent stranded, as it were *ex officio*, on his own desert island. But this leaves open the possibility that all agents are stranded on the *same* island (that public language is a congruence of private languages built separately on private ostensive definitions).

<sup>36</sup> Kripke, ‘Rules and Private Language’, p. 245.

<sup>37</sup> The plausibility of this bizarre picture seems to turn on the now popular conception of language as quasi-contractual, as if the distinction between correct and incorrect use of an expression turned on the prior adoption of an explicit convention. This seems as misguided as the now derided conviction that a social contract would provide the only possible foundation for political liberties, rights, and duties.

<sup>38</sup> Kripke, ‘Rules and Private Language’, p. 259.

<sup>39</sup> Kripke, ‘Rules and Private Language’, p. 263.

<sup>40</sup> It could also be an oblique way of explaining that the expression of uncertainty here is senseless, as in ‘Either I mean red by “red” or something else, I’m not sure’. Cf. *PI* §§246–7.

<sup>41</sup> There is, in certain contexts of ‘mean’ or ‘intend’, a problem about self-deception. The present context is not such a one.

<sup>42</sup> For detailed discussion, See Baker and Hacker, *Wittgenstein: Understanding and Meaning*, p. 595 ff.

<sup>43</sup> Kripke, ‘Rules and Private Language’, p. 245.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 249 f.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 273 f.

<sup>46</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Grammar*, pp. 161 f., 199 ff., 212 ff.

<sup>47</sup> For a more detailed analysis of Wittgenstein’s resolution of the problem of the pictoriality of thought, see P. M. S. Hacker, ‘The Rise and Fall of the Picture Theory’, in I. Block (ed.), *Perspectives on the Philosophy of Wittgenstein*, p. 103 ff.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Kripke, ‘Rules and Private Language’, p. 281 f.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 285 f.

<sup>50</sup> It is curious that Kripke carefully encloses ‘correct’ with scare-quotes. Is it that there is no such thing as correctly using a sign on this account? The only option Kripke has *explicitly* left open is a Platonist one, viz. it is in the nature of such and such mathematical

object to yield such and such a value for such and such arguments (cf. Kripke, 'Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language', p. 264 f.). But this is certainly not Wittgenstein's view. And Kripke does not explain what he thinks Wittgenstein's view is.

<sup>51</sup> Or at least, in the arithmetical case, that he goes through the correct procedure.

<sup>52</sup> To this the reply might be that the requirement is not merely that he gives the same reply I am inclined to give, but rather that given the same information, he gives the same reply. So given that he knows that Genghis Khan was an unmarried man at the age of 22, he would answer the question of whether he was a bachelor in the same way as I am inclined to, given that information. This may be conceded; of course he will give the same answer – because he knows (as I do) what 'bachelor' means. It is not our agreement that is the ground for the judgement that he means bachelor by 'bachelor', but rather the explanation of its meaning which he gives and the applications of the word that he makes. The agreement is a framework condition for the language-game (*infra*, p. 437 f.), not part of the rules of the game.

<sup>53</sup> Parallel to Kripke, 'Rules and Private Language', p. 245.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 277, 284.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 296; a similar bizarre view is expressed by C. Peacocke in his defence of what he calls 'The community view' of rules: 'The community view can count such a person [as Crusoe] as a genuine rule-follower if he reacts to new examples in the same way as would members of our community, or of some other conceivable community'. See C. Peacocke, 'Reply: Rule-following: The Nature of Wittgenstein's Arguments', in S. Holtzman and C. Leich (eds.), *Wittgenstein: to Follow a Rule*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1981. Note that the subjunctive, together with the requirement of mere *conceivability* of a community, robs the qualification of any restrictive content whatever.

<sup>56</sup> There is something very wrong about recent talk of 'following one's inclinations' when applying rules. We do *not* teach children arithmetic by teaching them to follow their *inclinations*. We do not even teach them to have the same *inclinations* as we have. We teach them to follow arithmetical *rules*, we teach them that getting such and such results is what *counts* as following this or that rule. When we hit bedrock we do indeed follow the rule blindly, but that is not to say that we follow our inclinations blindly!

<sup>57</sup> A similar discussion of the language of Robinson Crusoe 'considered in isolation' occurs in MS 116, 117, where Wittgenstein examines a distinction between subjective and objective understanding. Crusoe could certainly play language-games by himself, Wittgenstein remarks. If one secretly observed his sign-using activities, and if one discerned in them certain kinds of complex regularities, one would rightly judge him to be using a language of his own.

<sup>58</sup> Kripke, 'Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language', p. 286.

<sup>59</sup> Kripke, 'Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language', p. 289.

<sup>60</sup> See Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, p. 323: 'peaceful agreement . . . belongs to the framework out of which our language works'. Cf. *PI* §240.

<sup>61</sup> Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, p. 365.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 330.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 392.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 392.

<sup>65</sup> Ourselves (in the past) included. Kripke's position differs substantially from Dummett's in respect of the issue of anti-realism, for nothing in his remarks about assertion-

conditions commits him to Dummett's anti-realist doctrines. While Dummett's interests lie, as it were, in the geometry of proof, Kripke's lie in the sociology of meaning.

<sup>66</sup> For a detailed analysis of the different *concepts* of truth-conditions, from the *Tractatus*, through Tarski, Carnap and onwards, see G. P. Baker and P. M. S. Hacker, *Language, Sense and Nonsense*, Blackwell, Oxford and New York, 1984, chapter 3.

<sup>67</sup> Kripke, 'Rules and Private Language', p. 273 f.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 274.

<sup>69</sup> See G. P. Baker and P. M. S. Hacker, *An Analytic Commentary on the Philosophical Investigations*, Volume 2 (forthcoming).

<sup>70</sup> The metaphysical object, he now thought, was an illusion. Its role was filled by *samples*, conceived as belonging to the calculus itself.

<sup>71</sup> Wittgenstein, *MS* 165, p. 82.

<sup>72</sup> Gottlob Frege, *Posthumous Writings*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1979, p. 145.

<sup>73</sup> Kripke, 'Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language', p. 267.

<sup>74</sup> This is not to say that his discussions of scepticism in *On Certainty* are unimportant, merely that it would be misconceived to represent these themes as lying at the heart of the *Philosophical Investigations*.

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