RULES IN CONTEXT
A Critique of Kripke's Interpretation of Wittgenstein

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PRECIS

La question de suivre une règle se réduit au paradoxe qu'aucune règle ne peut déterminer une action car toute action peut être interprétée comme étant en accord avec cette règle. Dans son oeuvre *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, Saul Kripke maintient que ce paradoxe semble mener à un scépticisme sémantique radical qui rend la notion de signification elle-même insignificative, mais il attribue à Wittgenstein une solution scéptique au problème. Suite à une abordation critique de l'oeuvre de Kripke, je conclue que cette solution ne réussie pas a résoudre la question puisqu'elle ne permet ni de normativité, exceptée la correction de l'individu par d'autres membres de sa communauté, ni d'entendement qui soit non-interpretif. Je propose donc à sa place une solution qui incorpore un entendement communautaire de l'arrière-plan à la notion Wittgensteinienne de forme de vie et qui ainsi assure la normativité de suivre une règle et du langage.

ABSTRACT

The rule-following problem can be condensed into the paradox that a rule cannot determine any course of action because every course of action can be made to accord with that rule. In his *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, Saul Kripke sees this paradox as potentially leading to a radical semantic scepticism that renders meaning itself meaningless, and attributes a sceptical solution of the problem to Wittgenstein. After a critical examination of Kripke's work, I conclude that this solution fails on account of allowing neither for a normativity beyond the subjection of the individual to correction by others in her community, nor for a non-interpretive conception of the understanding. Finally, I propose an alternative solution that incorporates the notion of communal background understanding into that of a form of life and thus preserves the normativity of rule-following and of language.

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Following according to the rule is central to our language game.
(RFM VI-28)

Introduction

Rules play a central role in human activity; indeed, were it not for rules, we might not be able to function as social animals at all - despite the adage that rules are meant to be broken. The question of the nature of rules crops up in a wide range of philosophical topics including ethics, action theory, and philosophy of mathematics. In philosophy of language, the issue of rule-following strikes at the heart of the tension between the regularity and the creativity manifest in language. Any theory of meaning is likely to be motivated by one or both of these two characteristics of ordinary language. The platitude that language is rule-governed expresses our recognition of the fact that meaning is fixed or determinate and normative. The rule-governedness of language supposedly accounts for how we are able to acquire language and understand each other in the first place. Yet there is an indefinite number of possible sentences one can construct and understand even though one has never heard them before. Not only do we understand words even though they are used in indefinitely many different circumstances and can have a slightly different meaning or connotation in each; we also have the capacity to create new metaphors and new words. The meaning of our words changes over time. Language is organic, not static. An adequate semantics must respect the rule-governedness of language, while allowing for the open-endedness of meaning that sustains linguistic creativity. The fact that we can find new ways of expressing ourselves with old familiar words, the fact that we are creative beings, demands that not everything be fully determined by rules. Yet if this freedom is distorted by analysis into an all-pervasive indeterminacy, we are faced with semantic scepticism.

This is illustrated by the rule-following discussion. On one hand, we think of rules as rigidly determining their applications. The function of rules is, if anything, to dictate courses of action. On the other hand, this seems impossibly difficult to explain. There seems to be no necessary connection between the rule and our applications of it. It appears inscrutable what makes a given action the application of a given rule. Wittgenstein's

paradigm example of this phenomenon in the *Philosophical Investigations*[1] is the training of someone to continue a series of integers according to the formula "+2" (185 ff.) The pupil is given a finite series of examples on the basis of which she grasps the rule. Yet when she is to carry on the series herself, it seems that the teaching examples and indeed her own past applications of the rule permit her to continue the series "996, 998, 1000" equally well with either "1004, 1008, 10012" or "1002, 1004, 1008". For there is any number of ways in which a rule can be interpreted, and there does not seem to be anything that rules out what intuitively we would consider a wrong interpretation. This, in a nutshell, is the sceptical paradox Saul Kripke attributes to Wittgenstein in his *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*.[2] The first chapter contains a more detailed presentation of Kripke's argument which inexorably leads to the sceptical conclusion that language is meaningless. If there is no fact that justifies an individual's meaning or intending one interpretation of a rule rather than another, then there is no fact of the matter as to what she means at all. Therefore our concept of meaning appears to be an illusion.

A remarkable amount of discussion and confusion has been generated by Kripke's book. Many of the objections brought against him fail to address the thrust of his argument. The fact of the matter is that much of what he says sounds if not right, then nonetheless highly plausible. I have in mind particularly his claim that the justification for an individual's meaning one thing rather than another cannot be found in that individual's head and must therefore be sought elsewhere, i.e. in the community. Although the appeal to the community follows an inherently correct intuition, some of Kripke's other claims unfortunately vitiate the legitimacy of the sceptical solution he proposes. The main

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[1] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1958, 232 pp.), henceforth *PI*. Numbers appearing in parentheses in the text refer to the numbered sections of this work.

[2] Saul A. Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1982, 150 pp.). Unless otherwise indicated all page references are to this text, henceforth *WRPL*.

culprit is his denial of what might be called normativity of meaning *tout court*, i.e. a kind of normativity that transcends the sense in which an individual's rule-following is right or wrong in virtue of being subject to correction by other members of her community. The result is a truncated picture of the community and of what constitutes practice embedded in a form of life.

Before moving on to discuss Kripke's solution, I briefly examine the notion of interpretation and its role in chapter 2. The criticisms raised against the sceptical problem by Crispin Wright and John McDowell that I address highlight the sceptic's method, prefigure more substantive criticisms of Kripke's sceptical solution, and, most importantly, clear the ground for an alternative. For the fact that Kripke ignores the possibility of a non-interpretive kind of understanding leads him to overlook the importance of what I shall refer to as "background understanding", and, as I maintain in chapter 3, this failure is one of the reasons for the inadequacy of this solution, despite the nominal reference to agreement and to form of life.

Kripke does not interpret Wittgenstein as embracing the paradox, but as rejecting it and the semantics from which it arises. The sceptical problem is to be seen as a *reductio ad absurdum* of a certain kind of theory of meaning in that it shows that on this theory, there ultimately can be no such thing as meaning. While I agree with this much, I will argue in the following that Kripke's Wittgenstein does not go far enough, but retains some of the presuppositions of the theory he claims to be abandoning. This theory, espoused by the early Wittgenstein and Frege, is a realist truth-conditional semantics some version of which dates back at least to Hobbes and Locke.[3] In its admittedly crude form, this type of theory views language as a system of signs we use to label our thoughts for the sake of memory and of communication with others. The criterion of meaningfulness is that a word correspond or refer to some idea that is analysable into simples. This correspondence of words to mental entities is paralleled by a correspondence of ideas, in

[3] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Collier MacMillan, London, 1962), chapter 4, and John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Dover, New York, 1959), Book 3.

turn, to objects in the world. With time, the notion of sentences or propositions corresponding to facts in the world evolved from this. The link between word and idea is purely psychological in that an individual could use any label whatsoever for his thoughts. There is no mechanism by which to decide whether someone is using the right word to express a thought or not. The fact that a linguistic community does use the same set of signs is simply a matter of convention, necessitated by our desire to communicate with each other. Not only does such a theory allow for the possibility of private language and is therefore susceptible to charges of solipsism. It furthermore lacks an account of intentionality, i.e. of what it means for a subject to mean something by a word and for that word to be about something. Thirdly, it shows complete disregard for the issue of normativity, i.e. of what makes a word the *right* word in some context.

The neglect of this last aspect will turn out to be the downfall of Kripke as well who, as I charge in chapter 3, replaces the conventionalism of a Lockean semantics with brute conformity. This effectively causes even greater problems for a view that considers language as a mere tool, a means of translating our thoughts. Kripke claims that his sceptical solution saves normativity for the individual. That is, it is intended to preserve the legitimacy of attributing determinate meanings to an individual by making her subject to communal standards, which is to say, to correction by others. However, I argue that since by his own admission, his solution does not render the community as a whole subject to any standards and indeed denies that there are such standards, i.e. that there is normativity *tout court*, he is not entitled to say that a single individual's rule-following is right or wrong. Therefore, the solution fails. Its failure ultimately rests on its sceptical nature. Despite assurances to the effect of rejecting a truth-conditional framework according to which the sought justification for a person's rule-following must be a fact about that person, the fact remains that for Kripke, the only straight solution to his paradox would be a fact that justifies meaning as being in an individual's head, i.e. as being "idiolectic". As a result, he is incapable of seeing that there is a further solution, which I sketch in chapter 4 and which rejects this last premise. This straight rather than

sceptical solution rests on a different conception of what it means for justifications to run out than Kripke's. Rather than reducing reaching bedrock to brute agreement and conformity, as I show Kripke does, it incorporates the notion of background understanding, which is communal rather than idiolectic, into the concept of a form of life.

As prevalent as the Lockean kind of theory of language has been and still is, it has not escaped altogether the influence of the insights guiding an alternative way of considering language. This alternative finds its historical roots in figures such as Herder and Humboldt.[4] Unlike Hobbes, Locke and others, who regarded language to be little more than an envelope in which to convey thoughts to one another, these thinkers denied the existence of a prelinguistic understanding or thought. On their view, reason, understanding, and language are equiprimordial. Even pointing is already a form of naming and hence of language. It is already a use of signs. Not only is it difficult to imagine a stage where humans did not use or recognise some form of signs, but it seems an essential part of their nature as rational agents that they do so. To quote Herder, "There is no before the use of all natural signs, even a few weeks after birth."[5] According to this alternative view, then, language is not so much a tool we use for communication and description as it is a form of expression, much in the way that gesture is. Insofar as such a theory considers language to be constitutive of our form of life, Wittgenstein is to be placed squarely within this tradition.

Heir to the truth-conditional semantics which the later Wittgenstein rejects, most of 20th century analytic philosophy of language has consisted in an effort to formalise meaning by specifying rules for use. Post-Wittgensteinians, however, must confront the question whether meaning can indeed be exhaustively formulated in terms of rules and what it means to define it as use. An understanding of the relation between linguistic use,

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[4] Johann Gottfried Herder, *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache* (Hauser, München, 1978), and Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Schriften zur Sprache* (Reclam, Stuttgart, 1973).

[5] Herder, op. cit., p. 19. Cf. Condillac, "Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humaines".

meaning, and rules is therefore essential. If one can show that rules themselves by their very nature rest on something that is not formalisable and cannot be made fully explicit, then we cannot hope to fully capture meaning in terms of rules. This, I claim, is precisely what the alternative view of language points toward by showing that in order to use language, we require a background understanding of our form of life. This background understanding resists formalisation because it cannot be fully articulated. At the same time it is necessary to block the kind of scepticism promoted by Kripke's sceptic. Without it, the logical gap between rules and our applications of them is distorted into a gaping "chasm of scepticism".

It should be noted that my concern whether Kripke's is a correct interpretation of Wittgenstein is secondary to the concern with the question of rule-following as such. That being said, I should also acknowledge that some passages in Wittgenstein lend themselves to precisely the kind of reductivist interpretation for which I criticise Kripke. Thus, for instance, his use of "Abrichtung" for "training", or his assertions to the effect that "this is just the way we go on". Nevertheless, there are others that support a reinterpretation of assertions of this kind compatible with a non-reductivist, non-behaviourist reading of Wittgenstein which, it seems to me, it is more charitable to attribute to him. Finally, as Kripke is not expounding his own views in *WRPL* but those of "Wittgenstein as he struck Kripke" the following is a critique of "Kripkenstein". For the sake of simplicity, however, and since I will not be looking at any of Kripke's other writings, I shall generally refer to the sceptical protagonist of the work as 'Kripke' and occasionally as 'Kripke's sceptic' or 'Kripke's Wittgenstein'. The name 'Wittgenstein' will be used to refer to the author of the *Philosophical Investigations* - as he struck Fultner.

1. Indeterminacy of Rules

Rules, orders, the words of our language in general can in principle always be interpreted in an indefinite number of ways, and, presumably, how we interpret them guides our subsequent actions. However, not every interpretation is as good as the next and ordinarily we accept but a few of the alternatives as even viable ones. Consider the following case of giving an order. Claire tells Roger to do the dishes, and he descends to his pottery studio in the basement and starts making plates and bowls. Clearly, Claire knows what she wants Roger to do, and what he actually does is not it. The example of course is somewhat strained so as not to say bizarre, but in fact many of our jokes operate on this principle of introducing aberrant interpretations into certain contexts, thus thwarting our expectations. The present point is that even if Claire formulates her order in the most precise way she can think of, it is conceivable that, in following her order and with the (albeit questionable) intention of following it, Roger do something contrary to what she indended him to do. For when we convey rules to others, we do not have all the possible nor most nor perhaps any of these interpretations 'in mind' or 'before the mind's eye'. After all, how much more precise could Claire's formulation of the order be? The fact is that one would not ordinarily react to these words the way Roger does. Wittgenstein's own and somewhat tamer example is that of telling someone to show the children a game, upon which the preson proceeds to show them a card game - which is not what the first person had in mind (*PI*, p. 33).

Not only do we not have all the possible misinterpretations of our orders in mind; we fare no better with the correct applications. This is most clearly demonstrated by the case of rule-following because it is not only normative but, unlike complying with an order, normally involves repeated applications of the rule reaching behond the situation at hand. If I tell someone to create a series of integers by continually adding 2, I need not think that when she reaches 556, the following number must be 558. It seems, then, that a rule does not somehow subsume all its applications. That is to say, rules seem in some sense not fully specified. Nevertheless, if the person produces 560 or anything other than

558, I can correct her. I can tell her what the nature of her mistake is and how she is to correct it. The rule-following problem issues from the question whether and how I am *justified* in correcting her. The search for a justification, on a certain picture of semantics, leads to the "sceptical paradox" which Saul Kripke attributes to Wittgenstein in *WRPL*.

Kripke bases his argument on (201) which states that "no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made to accord with the rule." In other words, it can be *interpreted* such as to accord with the rule, or, conversely, the rule can be interpreted such as to dictate that course of action. Kripke uses the following thought experiment to dress up the paradox. Most of us use the word 'plus' or the symbol '+' to refer to a unique mathematical function. That is, we have grasped a rule by means of external and internal representations (p. 7). This rule, we believe, determines an individual's answers in future cases. However, at any given moment, she has calculated only a finite number of sums and yet these finite past applications or intentions are meant to determine future applications. (There is, of course, a subtle shift from speaking about grasping a rule which allegedly determines my future actions to claiming that it is my past applications and intentions which determine my future responses which is not acknowledged by Kripke.) This gap between past intentions and the rule that gives rise to the indeterminacy illustrated by the introduction of a "bizarre sceptic" (p. 8). Suppose that '68 + 57' is a calculation one has never performed before and that there is a function other than addition, call it 'quaddition', such that '$x * y = x + y$ if $x,y < 57$, $= 5$ otherwise'. The problem the paradox presents lies in determining what justifies answering in accordance with addition rather than quaddition on the basis of *one's past intentions*. How can I tell that when I used 'plus' in the past I meant addition and not quaddition? What makes it the case that I meant one and not the other? After all, up to this point all my past actions are *ex hypothesi* equally compatible with addition as with quaddition. In quasi-Quinean terms, the past applications underdetermine which rule I have been following and how I should go on.

The paradox questions how rule-following is possible at all. How is it that rules can dictate some actions while proscribing others? And how do we come to 'grasp' rules in the first place? Kripke acknowledges that the quaddition hypothesis is "ridiculous and fantastic" and no doubt false, "but if it is false, there must be some fact about my past usage that can be cited to refute it. For although the hypothesis is wild, it does not seem to be *a priori* impossible" (p. 9). If no such fact can be found, the hyposthesis that in the past I meant quaddition by '+' is as logically compelling as that I meant addition. In other words, there is no fact of the matter as to which I meant. If that is the case, however, then there is nothing in virtue of which I can be said to have been following one rule rather than the other or, indeed, to have meant anything at all. Hence my rule-following is reduced to an unjustified "stab in the dark"; I apply the rule *blindly*, so to speak (p. 17). Moreover, if the sceptic cannot be defeated, then not only our concept of rule-following but also our concepts of meaning and intending will turn out to be ultimately meaningless and illusory. Yet to concede this is to abandon all standards of correctness and consistency to which we normally hold. What is ultimately at stake is the normativity of meaning, and in the case of rule-following this amounts to the issue of getting it right, of going on the right way. In a sense, the question of normativity (how ought I to go on?) is intimately intertwined with that of objectivity (what rule am I actually following?). In anticipation of the discussion of the devastating consequences of this sort of scepticism and of the helplessness of Kripke's sceptical solution against it, not that the interconnectedness between normativity and objectivity sometimes emerges in discussions of anti-realist semantics. An anti-realist about semantic facts such as Crispin Wright, for instance, denies the objectivity of meaning yet wants to preserve its normativity.[1] This, however, proves to be difficult if not impossible. Once the lack of objectivity has been introduced at one level, i.e. that of semantic facts, it is difficult to contain it to that level and prevent it from infecting all of language. But unless such an epidemic can be avoided, the

[1]Crispin Wright, "Rule-Following, Meaning and Constructivism", *Meaning and Interpretation*, Charles Travis, ed. (Blackwell, Oxford, 1986).

normativity of meaning will also be contaminated.

Note furthermore that if I know what rule I am following, then I also know how to go on and *vice versa*. This is basically what it means to say that there is an internal relation between a rule and its applications and what in effect constitutes the normative nature of rules. To insist on this feature of rules, however, as Baker and Hacker[2] for instance do, is to miss the import of Kripke's paradox. For he does not deny that rules dictate certain types of behaviour or that the concept of addition is somehow fuzzy or indeterminate. He is quite explicit on the latter point as a matter of fact. The present thought experiment presupposes that there is an internal relation between a rule and its extension. Insofar as '5' is an answer in accordance with quaddition, not addition, the applications are determined by the respective rules. In this sense, Kripke has set it up such that the possibility of the normative application of either rule is presupposed. As he himself emphasises, the determinacy of the concept of addition *per se* is in no way undermined:

> ... the word 'plus' denotes a function whose determination is *completely* precise... The point of the sceptical problem is ... that anything in my head leaves it undetermined *what* function 'plus' (as I use it) denotes (plus or quus)...(p. 82).

The claim that how we go on, the applications of the rule allows us to distinguish the two rules is misleading and fails to address the problem in question. For even if the issue between quaddition and addition is decided by someone's answering '5' or '125', a new rule, say 'skaddition', can be imagined which again is equally compatible with the person's past applications. Thus, one might say, Kripke's is not a scepticism about rules as such but about our use of rules, our ability to pick out an apply one rule rather than another. The query concerns what justifies my thinking that I am in fact following one rule rather than the other and hence what justifies my responding '125' rather than '5' in answer to '57 + 68'. The sought justification, then, is the very thing that would underwrite the

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[2] Gordon Baker and Peter Hacker, *Scepticism, Rules and Language* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1984).

normativity of our rule-following.

Before turning to the kind of answer that would satisfy the sceptic and to the various candidates Kripke considers and subsequently eliminates, there are two points that merit attention. Firstly, Kripke stresses that the quaddition hypothesis is merely a dramatic device (p. 10). It has been suggested that Kripke does not in fact need to introduce quaddition as a rival rule at all. Thus Simon Blackburn proposes that the sceptic might just doubt that there is any principle at all behind the application of '+'.[3] The trouble with this suggestion is that scepticism about whether there is any principle behind the applications of a term at all would seem to amount to scepticism about rules. But as I have just indicated, Kripke does not want to commit himself to such scepticism. Whether it turns out to be an unavoidable consequence of the kind of scepticism to which he does want to subscribe is another matter.

Be that as it may, in principle, the sceptical problem concerning rule-following could be formulated without appealing to a crazy alternative rule. For the sceptic claims not merely that the question whether in the past I meant addition or quaddition is undecidable but that there is no fact of the matter as to what I meant *tout court*. It therefore makes no difference how many alternative interpretations we actually envisage since all mental and behavioural facts about my past are in principle compatible with an indefinite number of interpretations. Hence, Kripke's paradox leads to ontological and not to epistemological scepticism. Indeed, we are supposed to have perfect recall of the past, perfect access to all the available facts. To this effect, Kripke introduces, as a further dramatic device, an omniscient God who would presumably be able to detect any fact whatsoever, even though we ourselves might not have access to such a fact. The challenge to his opponent consists in demanding what fact about meaning there might be to know even for such a god. The claim that there is no fact as to what we mean, amounts to saying that even from a God's eye point of view there would be no such fact to be known.

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[3] Simon Blackburn, "The Individual Strikes Back", *Synthese* 58, 1984, p. 288.

Having established that the scepticism at issue is not epistemological but ontological, it must be added that nonetheless epistemological concerns are not far afield. At the most elementary level, if there is no fact of the matter as to what I meant, how can I *know* what I meant? This implies that it is possible to put the ontological scepticism in epistemological terms. The question of what justifies my believing that I meant addition rather than quaddition can be cashed out either ontologically or epistemologically. That is, one can go on to ask (i) what (fact) makes it the case that I meant addition? or (ii) how do I know that I meant addition? This possibility, I believe, may have caused some misunderstanding in the literature responding to Kripke insofar as several critics tend to concentrate on the epistemology and neglect the ontological issue. In the end, whichever route one chooses perhaps makes but a negligible difference. If one approaches the problem from an ontological vantage point, one must eventually confront epistemological scepticism and *vice versa*. Thus, resisting the ontological scepticism will entail adopting an epistemology in which such scepticism cannot arise.

The second point follows directly from the ontological scepticism. The sceptic begins by questioning the determinacy of past usage. How do we know that *in the past* I meant addition by '+' and not quaddition? However, if there was no fact of the matter in the past, then there cannot be one at present either. Hence the sceptic's point can be generalised to affect all meaning and intending. One might of course decide to jump ship at this stage. Kripke admits that unless we begin by questioning only past usages, the problem cannot even be formulated (p. 14). If that is so, it might at least give us cause to reflect on whether, once we do "pull the rug out from under our feet", it makes sense to keep talking at all! Such global semantic scepticism may well belong to the realm of the unsayable - or else be simply incoherent. Looking ahead to Kripke's sceptical solution, some will protest and remind us that he does not deny the usefulness and normativity of the concept of meaning *per se* but merely the existence of a certain kind of fact. Again, whether or not Kripke can get off the hook will depend on the acceptability of his own

proposed solution and on whether normativity of meaning can be maintained if Kripkensteinian scepticism is embraced.

But first, we must deal with more direct attempts to diffuse the sceptical paradox, i.e. those which purport to come up with the requisite justification for our giving one answer rather than another, a fact that would make it the case that in the past I meant addition, not quaddition. What would count as such a justification for claiming to get it right? According to Kripke,

> [a]n answer to the sceptic must satisfy two conditions. First, it must give an account of what fact it is (about my mental state) that constitutes my meaning plus, not quus. But further, there is a condition that any putative candidate for such a fact must satisfy. It must, in some sense, show how I am justified in giving the answer '125' to '68+57'. (p. 11)

The first of these conditions can be called a solipsism requirement. The putative fact must be a fact *about an individual*. The fact may be behavioural or mental, the individual considered from the first or third person point of view,[4] but there must be no reference to any community or to communal practice. The individual is to be considered in isolation, solipsistically. This is crucial for the role Kripke later attributes to truth and assertibility conditions and to the private language argument. The second condition, the justification requirement, is mildly puzzling since Kripke seems to demand that the putative fact not only *serve as* a justification but also *show how* it constitutes such a justification. Apparently it is to justify an individual's rule-following as well justify itself or its claim to be a justification. At the same time, it must be entirely independent of the individual's meaning addition; that is, it must not presuppose that fact. It is unclear how *any* fact could satisfy this dual justification requirement since it would seem that showing how something justifies something else involves reference to a third something. Therefore it appears that the very condition Kripke puts on the putative fact invites an infinite regress. In light of this, Kripke's sceptic can indeed do little more than claim that since

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[4] It is essentially these two aspects that constitute what Kripke calls the radical novelty of this kind of scepticism and what distinguishes his Wittgenstein from someone such as Quine's radical interpreter.

"justifications come to an end somewhere", ultimately our rule-following is a stab in the dark.

Kripke devotes most of the second chapter of *WRPL* to the rejection of various candidate facts. It turns out that all the responses he considers essentially miss their mark by failing to so much as tackle the problem with which he is concerned. Thus, for example, to suggest that one can discount quaddition on the grounds that addition is the simpler hypothesis presupposes that there exists a fact in virtue of which they can be differentiated. Since there is no such fact, simplicity considerations cannot be brought to bear. This vitiates the criticism entertained by Crispin Wright that even if the finitude of linguistic behaviour prevents us from having conclusive grounds, this does not mean that we have no "rational basis for preference among indefinitely many competing hypotheses."[5] This position, however, simply ignores the force of the ontological scepticism. My primary reason for even mentioning this sort of suggestion here is that Kripke uses it as a springboard to criticise the view that we do not have direct access to the facts whether we mean plus or quus.

> The idea that we lack 'direct' access to the facts whether we mean plus or quus is bizarre in any case. Do I not know, directly, and with a fair degree of certainty, that I mean plus? Recall that a fact as to what I mean now is supposed to *justify* my future actions, to make them *inevitable* if I wish to use words with the same meaning with which I used them before. This was our fundamental requirement on a fact as to what I meant. No 'hypothetical' state could satisfy such a requirement: If I can only form hypotheses as to whether I now mean plus or quus, if the truth of the matter is buried deep in my unconscious and can only be posited as a tentative hypothesis, then in the future I can only proceed hesitatingly and hypothetically, *conjecturing* that I probably ought to answer '68 + 57' with '125' rather than '5'. Obviously this is not an accurate account of the matter . There may be some facts about me to which my access is indirect, and about which I must form tentative hypotheses: but surely the fact as to what I mean by 'plus' is not one of them! To say that it is, is already to take a big step in the direction of scepticism. Remember that I immediately and unhesitatingly calculate '68 + 57' as I do, and the meaning I assign to '+' is supposed to *justify* this procedure. I do not form tentative hypotheses, wondering what I should do if one hypothesis or another were true (p. 40).

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[5] Crispin Wright, "Kripke's Account of the Argument Against Private Language", *The Journal of Philosophy*, 1984, p. 772.

We may thus add a third condition on the putative fact, namely that, if it exists, it is known to the individual directly. Keep in mind for future reference, however, that it is the fact that is supposed to justify meaning plus, not the fact that I mean plus itself, which is supposed to be thus known.

Very likely the first reflex to the sceptical challenge is to cite facts from the agent's past history. What justifies the hypothesis that in the past Jones meant addition by '+' is that he learned to add in school, did his homework successfully, etc. But evidently, we are not allowed to give any such common sense answer to the question "What did Jones mean by 'plus' and how do we know what he meant?" Saying he learned how to add in school is only good enough if by 'add' we mean *add* and not quad, by 'sum' not quum, by 'count' not quount, and so on. The sceptic's argument is going to apply to the words used in any common sense explanation as much as it does to 'plus' itself. The common sense explanation, then, presupposes that we already know or are justified in what rule we are following and must therefore be ruled out.

A further response which Kripke discusses in some detail is based on a dispositional analysis of meaning. Kripke rejects the dispositional account of rule-following on two grounds, namely that i) dispositions extend to only finitely many cases, and ii) they are not normative but descriptive (p. 28-9). The two points are related in that the whole rule-following problem arises from the fact that rules are supposed to extend beyond past applications and indeed beyond any finite number of applications we may effect in our lifetime. I shall not address the question whether or not dispositions are best thought of as finite here but merely remark that there is room for debate on the issue. The normativity objection, however, is more central to my concerns in this essay. According to Kripke, dispositions cannot be what normatively guides our behaviour since often we are just as or more disposed to make mistakes as we are to behave correctly, where a disposition to make mistakes is a disposition to "give an answer other than the one that accords with the function I meant". On his account, it turns out that dispositions are infallible because

> where common sense holds that the subject means the addition function as everyone else but systematically makes computational mistakes, the dispositionalist seems forced to hold that the subject makes no computational mistakes, but means a non-standard function ... by '+'(p. 30).

The only way to defend a dispositional account at this stage, it seems to me, would be to enrich the notion of disposition, thereby rendering it normative. This would involve seeing dispositions less as behaviouristic tendencies than as capacities. We can either conceive of dispositions as merely behaviouristic tendencies, such as when I am disposed to say "rue Beaudry" when I really mean 'rue Bleury'. Or we can have a richer conception of dispositions as capacity- or skill-involving. Unlike the first conception, the second has a built-in normative element.[6] It is unlikely that this notion of skill-involving capacity would satisfy the criteria for the kind of fact the Kripkensteinian sceptic is looking for, however.

Kripke introduces as a variant of the dispositional account what I would call a representationalist or rigid machine account of rule-following on which the objector to the sceptic can be interpreted

> as arguing that the rule can be *embodied* in a machine that computes the relevant function. If I build such a machine, it will simply grind out the right answer, in any particular case, to any particular addition problem. The answer that the machine would give is, then, the answer that I intended (p. 33).

In the end, 'machine' must be understood to mean 'programme'. For even if the machine is said to embody a function, one will in any case need to fall back on a set of instructions, i.e. a programme, in order to know how to interpret the machine. But the same problems can be raised with regard to the entire programme as with regard to the initial symbol '+'. Moreover, the values produced cannot really be said to be given by the machine since (i) it is a finite object yet "indefinitely many programs extend the actual finite behaviour of the machine" (p. 34); and (ii) just as people are disposed to make mistakes, machines can malfunction, but whether such a malfunction has occurred is

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[6] It seems that this distinction between a rich and a thin conception of dispositions is at play even in some passages of Gilbert Ryle's *The Concept of Mind*, (Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1949), e.g. p. 119.

"defined only in terms of its program, as stipulated by its designer" (p. 35). Therefore, the programme is open to exactly the same sceptical challenge as a set of dispositions that are supposed to determine what I meant.

Presumably, the idea behind this variant is that of a representationalist account of mind according to which the mind functions rather like a machine programme. Although Kripke does not make this explicit at this stage,[7] he must therefore be challenging the ability of such an account to explain our concept of meaning, i.e. to provide a complete semantics. Given Kripke's account of dispositions, it is not all too surprising that he should lump the dispositionalist and representationalist versions together. To be sure, his primary motivation for this is that both try to locate meaning in the individual speaker and are thus liable to the sceptic's challenge. But in addition to this, Kripke's scheme of definition for dispositions makes him sound as though he considers dispositions to be some special type of representation. Thus he writes that we are meant to be able to "'read off' which function I mean by a given function symbol *from my disposition*" (p. 26, italics added). Quite possibly this is unavoidable as soon as the attempt at formalizing, i.e. representing, dispositions is made. Should that indeed be the case, it would seem that we have struck the limits of analysis, or at least of the usefulness of formalization. Although Kripkenstein is acutely aware of the shortcomings of representations, he certainly does not go so far as to question the representational or formalizing approach to mind and, indeed, to philosophy.

Of course the association of mental representations and dispositions is facilitated by the sceptic's willingness to admit behavioural as well as mental facts. (Here, I believe, Kripke is quite right to emphasise that Wittgenstein's methods are deeply introspective and that while he holds that the behaviour of others and their dispositions are our basis for our *saying* of them that they are reading, for example, Wittgenstein does not believe reading

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[7] He does so considerably further on in the text where he describes the sceptical paradox as a critique of the idea that "'mental representations' uniquely correspond to 'facts', since it alleges that the components of such 'mental representations' do not have interpretations that can be 'read off' from them in a unique manner" (p. 85).

itself to be a disposition (p. 48).) If Kripke does not address the representationalist account explicitly, to do so may not be necessary anyway. Given that the sceptical problem is initially raised with regard to the symbol or representation'+' and given that the internal/mental and the external/behavioural are on equal footing, clearly an internal representation will fare no better than an external one. Taking the sceptical issue further still may lead to the question of how a rule can be represented in the mind at all. What sort of a (mental) representation could possibly correspond to the order or rule one gives? The short answer (which constitutes a rejection of the representationalist picture) is, none. The examples cited earlier indicate that even were we to have representations of such rules in the mind, they would underdetermine the use to which we put them. In other words, if the rule itself cannot determine what behaviour will count as following that rule, it is unclear why the representation of that rule should do it. The Kripkensteinian sceptic demands the mental representation to be one we could pull out of the flow of our thinking, so to speak, in order to use it as evidence from which we could infer what we mean. It should permit one to read off a (correct) interpretation and thus justify giving one answer rather than another in the case of addition. But what justifies my thinking that it is a representtion of addition rather than of quaddition?

In turning to the mental, Kripke himself considers the possibility of conceiving of meaning as an irreducible mental state but finds such a suggestion as off target as the dispositional account. Whether one thinks of it as a *quale* or as a state "even more *sui generis*", such a state would not be capable of uniquely determining how we are to go on in our rule-following.

> If there were a special experience of 'meaning' addition by 'plus', analogous to a headache, it would not have the properties that a state of meaning addition by 'plus' ought to have - it would not tell me what to do in new cases (p. 43).

To think of meaning as more primitive than such an introspectible state is to render it utterly mysterious and is considered a desperate move by Kripke. Moreover, as he points out, Wittgenstein argues that there cannot be any *state* that constitutes meaning. As a

finite object such a state could always be *interpreted* in a quus-like way regardless (p. 52). No state or process can entail what meaning entails (p. 53, note 36) any more than a disposition or representation can.

Having exhausted all the options for a putative fact that might constitute meaning and justify our rule-following, this, then, is the sceptical position: When an individual grasps a rule or the meaning of a word, there is nothing, no fact about that individual that explains why and uniquely determines that she go on one way rather than another. All her past history underdetermines future action and is compatible with an indefinite number of interpretations of the rule. As it stands, therefore, our concepts of meaning and intending are but illusory and ultimately make no sense. Whatever we put forth as a candidate fact serve as a justification for what we mean, such a fact could always be interpreted in various ways (p. 41-2). Therefore, no fact can solve Kripke's problem of how to bridge the apparent gap between a rule and its use. In order to do that, the fact would have to be an authoritative interpretation. But no interpretation can by itself determine meaning. So there is no fact in which our meaning anything or following any rule could consist, no fact of the matter as to what we mean.

One final remark concerning the breadth of this kind of scepticism. To put the problem in terms of a representation (be it mental or not) and what it represents or denotes is to broaden the scope of the sceptical challenge still. For thus understood, the problem transcends the question of any one *individual's* meaning or intending anything and addresses the question of how meaning as such is possible, how any symbol whatsoever can represent something else, how, in other words, it can have content. If this is indeed the heart of the matter, then Crispin Wright's reformulation of the sceptical conclusion as the rejection of scientific realism about theories of meaning is, at best, misleading.[8] As we shall see, while Kripke does deny that facts correspond to assertions about meaning, the solution he offers does not warrant this to be taken as a denial of fact-stating discourse

[8] Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 767.

altogether. Before turning to that solution, I wish to examine the notion of interpretation and the role it plays in Kripke's argument.

2. Rules and Interpretations

The preceding chapter began with the presumption that how we interpret rules determines our future behaviour in following these rules. The underlying assumption here is that in order to follow rules at all, in order to understand them, we must interpret them one way or another. It is this assumption that I now want to challenge in an effort to resist Kripke's sceptical argument. Recall that the Kripkensteinian paradox consists in a rule's inability to determine any course of action because it cannot rule out unwanted or unintended interpretations. It has been argued, however, that Kripke's exploitation of the paradox ignores and leaves no room for Wittgenstein's own diagnosis which immediately follows the statement of the paradox in (201):

> It can be seen that there is a misunderstanding here from the mere fact that in the course of our argument we give one interpretation after another; as if each one contented us at least for a moment, until we thought of yet another standing behind it. What this shews is that there is a way of grasping a rule which is *not an interpretation* but which is exhibited in what we call "obeying the rule" and "going against it" in actual cases.
>
> Hence there is an inclination to say: every action according to the rule is an interpretation. But we ought to restrict the term "interpretation" to the substitution of one expression of the rule for another.

According to this, then, the way out of the paradox is to say that it must be possible to follow, to apply a rule without interpreting it. Before we can inquire into what that would involve, we must first ask what an interpretation is and where we should or should not ascribe one to a rule.

The final sentence of the above quotation indicates that Wittgenstein uses the term to refer to an explicit articulation or expression. Thus, while on one hand, one could say that inasmuch as '67 + 58 = 125' is an expression or application of the rule of addition, it constitutes an interpretation of it, Wittgenstein himself does not seem inclined to consider any act of addition to be an interpretation of the rule. This is supported by his earlier remark in (34) regarding the interpretation of an ostensive definition: "[T]his 'interpretation' can also consist in how [someone] makes use of the defined word". At first glance, this may be thought to leave it open whether he had in mind something inarticulate or not. However, his use of scare quotes suggests that he considered this a somewhat

strained use of the word. Therefore I take it that an interpretation is to be understood as something articulated, if only at the level of thought. An interpretation in this sense is precisely what is missing in a mere manifestation of a rule, i.e. in our ordinary application of it. Under normal circumstances, we follow rules unhesitatingly, without thinking about what we are doing. This, for Wittgenstein, constitutes a non-interpretive grasp and application of a rule.

The import of the sceptical paradox is that once an interpretation in the just stated sense is inserted between a rule and its application so as to determine the application, the fact that in theory an indefinite number of applications is possible on the basis of that interpretation leads us to believe - correctly - that our (or any) interpretation by itself cannot determine the application. "... any interpretation still hangs in the air along with what it interprets, and cannot give it any support" (198). Even if we take the interpretation to determine the facts of application (i.e. facts about the application which we consider salient), this determinacy holds up only so long as we do not go looking for interpretations of that interpretation or for what justifies this interpretation. To do that is to start playing the sceptic's game again.

Such interpretations leave us in the same predicament as rules for applying rules of which Wittgenstein speaks earlier in the *PI* (84). Essentially rules for applying rules (or second order rules) and interpretations function in the same way and to the same end. Rules for applying rules are considered by Wittgenstein as a possible remedy for doubts about how first order rules are to be applied. They are meant to stop up the holes open to doubt, to fill the gap between rules and applications. But whatever doubts the second order rule may block, similar doubts can now be raised against its application, and so on in an infinite regress. Hence we are back at the initial quandary concerning rule-following, and neither second order rules nor interpretations by themselves can remove all possible doubts as to the application of first order rules.

This is not to say, of course, that first and second order rules should be assimilated. On the contrary, where we do interpret rules or have rules for applying them,

interpretations or second order rules are irreducibly distinct from first order rules. Jurisprudence is a paradigm example of the usefulness and indeed of the necessity of interpretation or second order rules. How exactly the law is applied in a given instance depends on how it is interpreted in that particular court case, which in turn depends on the circumstances in question, the individuals involved etc. By the same token, should that ruling, that interpretation subsequently be used as a precedent, it will then itself have become (the basis for) a rule for applying the Rule of Law. What this example shows is that rule-following *may* involve interpretation. This is consistent with the fact that Wittgenstein says that there "must be *a way* of grasping a rule which is not an interpretation" (italics added), and not that there is *no way* in which grasping a rule *could* be an interpretation. Hence what is in dispute here is the idea that for us to know what we mean, there *must* be an interpretation. It seems more reasonable to hold that there are two kinds of rules: those that permit of interpretation, precisely because they do not of themselves determine what counts as in accord with them, and those that do not.

This distinction ought not be regarded as absolute, but rather as context-sensitive. That is, depending on the context, the grasping or applying of any one rule might or might not require an interpretation. The need for an interpretation can be considered as correlative with the doubt the rule leaves room for in the sense that Wittgenstein says that a sign-post sometimes leaves room for doubt and sometimes not (85). One can imagine some legal rule that leaves no room for interpretation, e.g. having to pay a fine for a traffic violation. Similarly, an utterance of the most ordinary phrase on a given occasion might be interpreted as a profound revelation about the speaker.

This by itself does not tell us how interpretations actually arise, but at least the outlines of an account of how this happens can here be provided. Insofar as rules for applying a rule are supposed to alleviate some kind of doubt concerning the application of the rule, the same can be said of interpretations. It therefore seems reasonable to say that both second order rules and interpretations arise or are given precisely when there is such doubt. In the wake of the sceptical paradox, however, it must be stipulated that the

doubt in question be a *reasonable* and not just any imaginable doubt. The ensuing question now is how such reasonable doubts arise. One source is the fact that, at least according to Wittgenstein, our activities are not everywhere bounded by rules (68). Nor do we have rules for all the possible applications of a word (80). As a result, even once we have found a way out of or around the present sceptical paradox, there will be instances where things will be up for grabs. In the face of such cases, our ordinary coping with our environment will be disturbed, halting the everyday course of events until we come up with a suitable interpretation that will allow us to go on. What in turn constitutes this everyday coping is, on this view, the non-interpretive understanding which Kripke ignores.

Of those who criticise Kripke for this omission, I shall consider McDowell and Wright. McDowell's central thesis is that proponents of anti-realist semantics in general do not consider the possibility of non-interpretive understanding and as a result fail to be able to account for the normativity of meaning. Unless we abandon the conception of understanding as interpretive, we are faced with a dilemma: on one horn of this dilemma, we are impaled on the sceptical paradox and lose all standards of objectivity and of normativity. The other horn consists of what he calls "the mythology of understanding and meaning", an account according to which rules are thought to fully determine their applications by themselves and are immune to the sceptical argument.[1] McDowell finds the dilemma unacceptable though not unavoidable as, he claims, does Wittgenstein. He accuses Kripke, on the other hand, of conflating the first horn of the dilemma with its solution by interpreting Wittgenstein as embracing the paradox.[2] We will be unable to fully assess the implications of his argument until an account of Kripke's solution is in place. For the moment, the issue is not so much to find fault with Kripke's solution as to resist his sceptical argument in the first place.

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[1] John McDowell, "Wittgenstein on Following a Rule", *Synthese 58*, 1984. p. 331.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 343.

McDowell addresses his criticism that anti-realists overlook the non-interpretive alternative not only against Kripke, but primarily against Crispin Wright.[3] Yet it seems that Wright himself is trying to get at something very much like a notion of non-interpretive understanding or knowledge when he talks of perceptual knowledge and of our ordinary notion of intention in his paper on Kripke. To be sure, instead of non-interpretive understanding, he stresses non-inferentiality, but the gist of the argument seems to be along similar lines inasmuch as both philosophers want to rehabilitate as a sufficient justification the appeal to the fact that so-and-so means such-and-such.

Wright's argument proceeds as follows: First he ingeniously exploits the techniques of Kripkenstein to construct a parallel case to that of semantic facts, showing that there are no facts of the matter about what we perceive.

> Imagine ... a skeptic who questions a claim about my former perception, say, "Yesterday I saw it raining." And suppose the ground rules are as for the dialogue with Kripke's skeptic; that is, I am to be permitted to adduce any relevant fact so long as I do not thereby presuppose that there is such a thing as knowledge of what I formerly perceived - since it is of belief in the very existence of the genre of knowledge that the skeptic is demanding justification. So I cannot simply claim to remember what I perceived; my ammunition will be restricted to my present *seeming-memories*, the presently available testimony of others, presently accessible putative traces... etc. ... It ought to be a straightforward, if tedious exercise for the skeptic to accommodate all that without granting me the truth of my claim about my perception of yesterday's weather. So I can know "all relevant facts" without knowing anything about what I formerly perceived. So there is no fact of the matter about what I formerly perceive. So, since the arguments will work just as well in the future when now is "then", there is no fact of the matter about what I *presently* perceive. So, since the argument applies to all of us, there is no such thing as perceptual knowledge.[4]

The restriction that any facts cited must not presuppose past perceptual knowledge in effect bars the way to just the kind of knowledge that is at issue. Wright's contention, however, is that Kripkensteinian sceptical techniques can be applied only where the kind of knowledge to be justified is of an inferential nature, that is, in cases where "the

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[3] McDowell is addressing Wright's paper on "Rule-Following, Meaning and Constructivism" cited above, not his critique of Kripke which appeared later. Although a footnote indicates that at the time of writing, McDowell was familiar with the latter, it does not seem to enter into his evaluation of Wright's views.

[4] Wright, "Kripke's Account", loc. cit., 1984, p. 774.

ultimate grounds for such knowledge ... reside in knowledge of a different sort." Only then can something like a justification "from without" be sought. But, Wright continues, to demand such a justification for a knowledge claim concerning a past perception, for example, is only fair play if knowledge of *present* perceptions is inferential, too. "[O]therwise the sceptic may satisfactorily be answered simply by recalling what one formerly perceived" or, in Kripke's case, by what one formerly meant. Wright then places the burden of proof that our knowledge of present meanings is indeed inferential on Kripke and offers our ordinary notion of intention as an example of non-inferential knowledge. Not only are intentions non-inferential; they are also "infinitely fecund". We frequently perform intentional acts without thinking about them, i.e without inferring either from our intention to whatever action will count as fulfilling it or from any particular action to some intention. The "fecundity" of intentions stems from their content being general in order to accommodate the fact that in order to fulfil, or do anything with my intention, I may have to behave in an indefinite number of ways. Wright writes,

> ... any *specification* that you might give of the content of that intention would be open to unwelcome interpretation. But, if you are granted the intuitive notion of intention, you can reply that you do not in any case know of the content of an intention via a specification of it; rather, to repeat, you recognise the adequacy of the specification because you know of the content of the intention. The point , in summary, is ... that the skeptical argument has absolutely no destructive force against that proposal.[5]

Similarly, we can say that we do not know what counts as following a rule *via* a specification of it but recognise the adequacy of the specification because we know what counts as following the rule.

Notwithstanding, Wright's discussion of intention is puzzling. Kripke's paradox, while it is ultimately concerned with meaning, initially concerns the ruling-out of un*intended* interpretations. Far from recognising the notion of intention to be immune to scepticism, Kripke can simply turn round and ask Wright what justifies his thinking that such and such a specification or interpretation is in fact the right specification of such and

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[5] *Ibid.*, p.777.

such an intention. Should Wright reply simply that he knows the content of that intention, the follow-up question is what justifies this claim in turn. To be sure, Wright stresses that he is appealing to the ordinary, commonsense notion of intention which may turn out to be incoherent. But again, if the ordinary notion of intention does the job, so, one would think, does the ordinary notion of meaning. Hence, it is rather unclear how the example is supposed to get us anywhere. Wright seems to completely disregard the fact that Kripke does not see Wittgenstein as rejecting our ordinary notion of meaning or of rule-following or of intention, for that matter. Rather, he is engaged in precisely the kind of analysis that shows up such notions as ultimately unjustified, incoherent, or whatever.

One possible source of confusion is that Wright casts his entire argument in epistemological terms, characterising the sceptic as demanding a justification for a "presumed genre of knowledge" and as denying the existence of perceptual knowledge. It may be useful to reformulate the argument somewhat. Instead of saying, for instance, that we must not cite a fact that presupposes the putative knowledge, we can say the fact must not presuppose the right interpretation (or, the interpretation which we actually give). For all Wright needs to show is that if the argument is allowed to go through, then there are no facts of the matter as to what we perceive just as Kripke claims there are no facts of the matter as to what we mean. It is unnecessary to bring in talk about knowledge claims which makes one susceptible to the retort that Kripke's is an ontological, not an epistemological scepticism. So, with this relatively minor amendment, his point concerning non-inferentiality stands.

Or does it? Recall that Kripke himself affirms that the fact the sceptic is demanding be known to the individual directly (see chapter 1). Granted, Kripke is explicitly addressing the idea that what is involved is *hypothetical* knowledge, but nonetheless, it is hard to imagine what he could mean by 'direct access to the facts' if not non-inferential knowledge of them. However, the point remains that even if such facts are admitted to be known non-inferentially, they in turn are supposed to justify what we mean. Wright's position, as I understand it, is that if non-inferentiality is applied "all the

way down", then the sceptical argument simply cannot get off the ground: That I meant addition by '+' is itself the fact that justifies that I meant addition by '+'. To this, the sceptic retorts that '+' or any other word can always be interpreted in a quus-like way. But then, presumably, she commits herself to an interpretive conception of the understanding. For only where understanding consists in interpretation does the spectre of a plurality of possible, if not plausible, interpretations loom up.

The earlier claim, therefore, that Kripke's argument is not dependent on the quaddition hypothesis (p.7 above) is subject to qualification. For while it makes no difference how many interpretations we may envisage, it now appears that there must be at least one interpretation. Otherwise, Kripkenstein's scepticism amounts merely to a denial that the facts he considers do not constitute meaning - which is *not* tantamount to a blanket denial that there are facts of the matter as to what we mean. If Kripke is indeed advocating this weaker scepticism, then it is somewhat misleading to deny that there are facts of the matter as to what we mean and, moreover, to call the solution he offers to the paradox a sceptical one. If, on the other hand, he is making the stronger ontologically sceptical claim, he must cast into doubt the validity of the very fact that I meant addition by '+'; and that is possible only if (i) that fact can be known only inferentially or (ii) that fact is understood interpretively. Both (i) and (ii) imply a reference to an external element, be it some other kind of knowledge or an interpretation, and in doing so, they open the gates for scepticism and leave indeed no room for the latter half of (201).

3. The Sceptical Solution: A Stab in the Dark?

If one does not block the sceptical argument, one reaches the conclusion, together with Kripke's Wittgenstein, that there is no fact of the matter whether we mean plus or quus or whatever. This conclusion, however, has devastating consequences. It reduces our rule-following to a stab in the dark; we act blindly, with no justification whatsoever. The sceptical paradox, the reader will recall, was that no rule could determine a course of action since any course of action could be made to accord with that rule. It sparked the search for a fact about an individual that would justify her going on in one way rather than another. That search turned out to be futile. If there is no fact of the matter as to what I mean, then I cannot mean anything by anything I ever say. The language I use becomes meaningless. As Kripke puts it, "Wittgenstein's main problem is that it appears that he has shown *all* language, *all* concept formation, to be impossible, indeed unintelligible". But, we may ask with some horror as Kripke does,

> if this is to be conceded to the sceptic, is this not the end of the matter? What *can* be said on behalf of our ordinary attributions of meaningful language to ourselves and to others? Has not the incredible and self-defeating conclusion, that all language is meaningless, already been drawn? (p. 71)

Kripke's sceptical solution, to which I turn in this chapter, is an effort to ward off this conclusion and to preserve the normativity of meaning. The value of the proposed solution is quite independent of the formulation of the sceptical problem which stands on its own (p. 60). Those with sufficient *sang-froid* may choose to simply resign themselves to the sceptical position while those who, like Kripkenstein, find the sceptical conclusion "insane and intolerable" (p. 60) may nonetheless also find the solution he offers unacceptable and continue the quest for a better alternative. Kripke's Wittgenstein does *not* consider himself to be embracing the sceptical paradox; the claim that the sceptic's demands are unanswerable is supposed to constitute a rejection of the paradox. However, it has been argued that to accept the paradox as unanswerable is to concede too much to

the sceptic, and that having gone this far, one is committed to the sceptical conclusion.[1] While the solution almost immediately strikes one as unsatisfactory, it is not easy to identify the exact source of one's dissatisfaction. The first part of this chapter is devoted to a detailed outline of Kripke's often misrepresented solution and to its defence against some of the criticisms brought against it. In the second part, however, I argue that ultimately, the solution fails to do the job Kripke claims it does, i.e. to preserve or restore a sense in which meaning ascriptions to individuals are justified. The problem is not so much internal to the structure of the solution as it concerns the way in which it is supposed to fit into an overall account of normativity and meaning. For Kripke, there is no such account. He does not acknowledge that there is a normativity *tout court* which governs the rule-following not only of an individual but also of the community; in fact, he denies that there is such a normativity. As a result, however, he is not entitled to claim to preserve normativity for the individual. Instead he ends up reducing normativity to brute conformity and brute inclinations. For making an individual's rule following subject to communal standards amounts to her getting her wrist slapped if she does not follow a rule as everyone else does or would. Apart from this, the way people apply a rule such as addition in the end is neither right nor wrong but "just the way we do it".

One of the first points to attract the attention of critics is the fact that Kripke calls his solution sceptical. The only 'straight' solution would be one appealing to a fact about the individual that would justify her meaning plus rather than quus by '+'. In conceding that there is no such fact, Kripke concedes that

> the sceptic's negative assertions are unanswerable. Nevertheless our ordinary practice or belief is justified because - contrary appearances notwithstanding - it need not require the justification the sceptic has shown to be untenable (p. 66).

This leaves it open whether he believes that there is no justification at all or merely that, since "meanings are not in the head", justification must be sought elsewhere. Leaving this issue aside for the moment, the solution endeavours to account for the intuition that our

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[1] McDowell, *op. cit.*, p. 331.

rule-following, our meaning addition by '+' does have some "substantive content" even though there is no fact of the matter as to what Jones, say, means by 'plus'. It is an attempt to tamper just enough with the philosophical construal of meaning and rule-following to do justice to the common sense belief that a person's rule-following is normatively guided.

It is important to keep in mind the scope of the sceptical argument. Kripke compares the scepticism he attributes to Wittgenstein to that of Berkeley. Neither philosopher wishes to reject common practice or ordinary talk but to discard a false philosophical picture. Kripke personally finds positions that see apparent contradictions of common sense as originating in philosophical misinterpretations of common language "almost invariably suspect" because their proponents make such claims only to offer their own analysis of common speech allegedly showing that the common man does not really say what he seems to say. What Wittgenstein and Berkeley would reject as false metaphysical pictures of common talk still appeals to Kripke as a rather good explanation of how things are:

> What the claimant calls a 'misleading philosophical misconstrual' of the ordinary statement is probably the natural and correct understanding. The real misconstrual comes when the claimant continues, "All the ordinary man really means is..." and gives a sophisticated analysis compatible with his own philosophy. (p. 65))

Setting aside his own views, he stresses the selective nature and specific target of the sceptical argument:

> [w]e do not wish to doubt or deny that when people speak of themselves and others as meaning something by their words, as following rules, they do so with perfect right. We do not even wish to deny the propriety of an ordinary use of the phrase 'the fact that Jones meant addition by such-and-such a symbol', and indeed such expressions do have perfectly ordinary uses. We merely wish to deny the existence of the 'superlative fact' that philosophers misleadingly attach to such ordinary forms of words, not the propriety of the forms of words themselves. (p. 69)

This 'superlative fact', according to Kripke, belongs to the kind of classical realist truth-conditional picture of semantics espoused by Frege and the Tractarian Wittgenstein (p. 71 ff.). It is this picture that lies at the source of the sceptical paradox for it stipulates that

language represents the world, that what gives meaning to language are truth-conditions, and that to every true statement there corresponds a fact in the world. Furthermore, facts and truth-conditions are held to be entirely independent of us and our ability to know or recognise them.[2] What the sceptical paradox calls into question is the unique correspondence relation between language and the facts of the world by pointing out that our words and intentions fail to *uniquely* pick out objects in the world. Indeed, there is no fact to which the statement "Jones means addition by 'plus'" corresponds (p. 77). Yet if statements derive their meaning from their truth-conditions or corresponding facts, then statements to which there are no corresponding facts are meaningless. It follows from this that

> if we remain in the grip of the natural presupposition that meaningful declarative sentences must purport to correspond to facts ..., we can only conclude that sentences attributing meaning and intention are themselves meaningless (p. 79).

In the *PI*, however, Wittgenstein, according to Kripke, rejects the truth-conditional account of meaning in favour of an account in terms of assertibility conditions, conditions, that is, under which certain moves are permitted in our language game. The rejection of the realist framework is what allegedly allows Kripkenstein to escape the sceptical paradox. The replacement of truth-conditions with assertibility or justification conditions and their utility in our practices has a dual role in the *PI*. (i) It offers a new approach as to how language gets meaning (p. 77). Instead of looking for truth-conditions or for corresponding facts that make some statement true, we are now to identify the circumstances under which the statement is made. In addition, the permissibility of the moves in a language game must have some utility or role to play in our lives. In other words, instead of asking, "What must be the case for this statement to be true?" we must ask, "Under what circumstances may this form of words be appropriately asserted (or denied)?" and "What is the role, and the utility, in our lives of our practice of asserting (or

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[2] The repudiation of this "ratification-independence" is not particularly stressed by Kripke, but is one of the core attributes of an antirealist semantics according to McDowell, see below.

denying) the form of words under these conditions?" (p. 73). The second requirement is what sets Wittgenstein apart from positivist verificationists and intuitionists who also subscribe to assertibilist rather than to truth-conditional semantics (p. 75). Both the assertibility conditions and their role are to be identified not *a priori* but by looking at our practices and describing them. (ii) The assertibilist semantics can be applied to give an account of assertions about meaning themselves, regarded as assertions *within* our language (p. 77). This solves the sceptical paradox by eliminating the need to provide a fact justifying my meaning addition by '+' for example. As long as there are "roughly specifiable circumstances"[3] under which assertions attributing meaning to speakers are legitimate and "the game of asserting them under such conditions has a role in our lives ... [n]o supposition that 'facts correspond' to those assertions is needed" (p. 77-8). It appears, therefore, that there is a justification for meaning ascriptions according to Kripke, one which is not constituted by a fact about the individual speaker. However, this leaves the question of what makes it the case that certain assertions are legitimate under such and such circumstances. To raise this question is in effect to raise the issue of what I referred to as normativity *tout court* above and to which I shall return in the latter part of this chapter.

As assertibility conditions are applied to everyday discourse as well as to what might be called meta-discourse, the sort of criticism raised by Crispin Wright is unlikely to worry Kripke. Wright argues that Kripke's proposed theory of meaning sees us as projecting our feelings of constraint on the world in order to account for our thinking that there is a fact of the matter that justifies our rule-following. Such a projectivist theory is going to "enjoin a projectivist view of what it means for a statement to be true".[4] This

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[3] The assertibility conditions are only *roughly specifiable;* they are not necessary or sufficient in the way that truth-conditions are. It is possible to reject this part of Kripke's solution by arguing that while assertibility conditions are roughly specifiable in particular instances, no general specification, however rough, can be provided. In other words, one can reject the idea that a theory of meaning in terms of assertibility conditions can be given.

[4] Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 769.

in turn will lead to the view that all statements are projectivist. The argument runs roughly as follows. If assertions about meaning are not genuinely fact-stating, then neither is the sceptical conclusion nor any other statement. For once we allow that there are no facts of the matter at the level of meaning ascription discourse, we cannot say that there is a fact of the matter as to what any statement means, irrespective of the occasion of its utterance. In claiming that non-factuality thus infects all levels of language, Wright is evidently arguing that Kripke cannot maintain ordinary (non-superlative) fact-stating discourse while denying that there is a fact of the matter as to what we mean. However, since Kripke considers the sceptical paradox to affect the whole of language and wants to apply the remedy of assertibility conditions to all statements, such a criticism leaves his position unscathed.

Despite his denial of the existence of a 'superlative fact', then, Kripke's Wittgenstein is not a sceptic about a particular kind of fact or entity. Nevertheless, this denial combined with Kripke's repeated insistence that there is no "fact of the matter" as to what we mean, the desire to justify ordinary fact-stating discourse, and the absence of a more detailed account of everyday facts does leave *WRPL* somewhat susceptible to this misreading. Unfortunately Kripke says little concerning the notion of fact beyond simply maintaining that Wittgenstein makes short shrift of objections to the effect that our use of expressions such as "it is a fact that" and "it is true that" together with meaning ascriptions shows that there are, after all, facts of the matter as to what we mean. For Kripkenstein, these expression fail to show that there are facts of the matter as to what we mean since firstly, he subscribes to a redundancy theory of truth according to which such expressions add nothing to the original proposition, and secondly, he believes our application of truth-functions to certain sentences to be simply a primitive part of our language game "not susceptible of deeper explanation" (p. 86). Hence such application is a 'brute' fact, a point the significance of which will emerge with greater clarity below.

How is the replacement of truth conditions with assertibility conditions supposed to solve the sceptical problem? Firstly, as we have just seen, it circumvents the need to

produce a fact about me that is independent of my meaning addition. Secondly, Kripke claims, it entails that language is public and possible only within a community. Recall that the paradox dealt with the problem of finding a fact about an individual *considered in isolation* that would justify a right way of following the rule. This proved to be impossible; normativity for an individual in isolation cannot be preserved. The sceptical solution is intended to allow us to say nonetheless that there is a right way to go on for the individual, that a person's rule-following is guided by norms. Now, if truth conditions are replaced with assertibility conditions, we can finesse the problem since, as Kripke maintains, assertibility conditions cannot meaningfully be applied to an individual considered in isolation (whether from a first or third person point of view) and therefore necessarily involve reference to a wider community.

> [T]he 'assertability conditions' that license an individual to say that, on a given occasion, he ought to follow his rule this way rather than that, are, ultimately that he does what he is inclined to do. ... [I]f we confine ourselves to looking at one person alone, his psychological states and behavior, this is as far as we can go (p. 80).

Ultimately, then, for an individual thus considered to *think* she is following a rule *is* for her to follow that rule, and this flouts our ordinary notion of what it is to follow a rule. Hence to limit one's consideration to an individual in isolation is to commit oneself to the sceptical paradox, whether one subscribes to a truth-conditional or to an assertibilist semantics. To put it another way, in the context of the private linguist, no significant difference can effectively be drawn between the two accounts. On the truth-conditional realist picture, we have found that no fact exists that justifies Jones's primitive inclination to go on one way rather than another. On the assertibilist account, we can still appeal only to Jones's primitive inclinations because there is no independent checking mechanism or standard by which to judge whether these inclinations are correct or incorrect. In either case, there is no room for a difference between Jones's being right and his thinking that he is right. Hence one cannot speak of being right or wrong at all. As the sceptical conclusion and solution do "not allow us to speak of a single individual, considered by himself and in isolation, as ever meaning anything" (p. 68-9), the possibility of private rule

following and indeed of any private language must be rejected. Thus the argument against private language, condensed into (202), emerges as a corollary of the alternative picture of semantics.[5]

Having ruled out the possibility of a private rule follower and of private language, Kripke finds that

> [t]he situation is very different if we widen our gaze from consideration of the rule follower alone and allow ourselves to consider him as interacting with a wider community. Others will then have justification conditions for attributing correct or incorrect rule following to the subject, and these will *not* be simply that the subject's own authority is unconditionally to be accepted (p. 89).

Once the person is seen as a member of a community, she is subject to correction by others and hence to norms independent of her impulses. Thus the only standards of correctness that are legitimate on the assertibilist theory are the practices of the community. Others can judge whether someone's brute inclinations are right or wrong, i.e. whether they conform to communal practice. Their assent sanctions her rule-following. The justification or assertibility conditions they apply hinge on whether or not the individual's responses agree with their own. Rough assertibility conditions for sentences such as "Jones means addition by 'plus'" can be discerned on the basis of observations of a common practice of concept attribution, according to Kripke.

The second requirement stipulated by the solution - that the assertion of such statements have a role in our lives - is fulfilled by an account of the utility of attributing the concept of addition to others. For example, our interactions with grocers would be much hampered if not impeded entirely, could we not expect grocers to apply the concept of addition as we do ourselves (p. 75-6). Indeed, unless we generally attributed meanings to one another, most of our interactions with others would be radically different from what they are. (For further discussion, see chapter 4.)

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[5] Such a reading of the private language argument has been disputed by McDowell for example, who ascribes a stronger role to it as the "condition of the possibility of a non-interpretive conception of the understanding". For further discussion of the private language argument, see below.

Kripke gleans three closely related key concepts from his interpretation of Wittgenstein: agreement, form of life, and criteria. First, agreement. Our talk about meaning essentially constitutes a language game of concept attribution to others. Such a game would lose its value among people reduced to a "babble of disagreement" (p. 91). The community must be one that generally agrees in its practices. Hence, Kripke takes it to be a *brute fact* that we generally agree (p. 97). According to Kripke, an individual's agreement with the community is the result of sufficient training which leads almost all of us to respond roughly the same to addition problems. The fact that we are generally susceptible to such training and do indeed agree is simply a 'brute fact', i.e. a fact admitting of no further justification or explanation.

> There is no objective fact - that we all mean addition by '+', or even that a given individual does - that explains our agreement in particular cases (p. 97).

By "objective fact" Kripke presumably means what elsewhere he calls a 'superlative fact': a fact that is independent of our meaning addition by '+'. Brute facts, it seems fair to say, are facts at the level of what Wittgenstein would call bedrock, the level at which "my spade is turned" (217) and I can penetrate no further. At this level I act without justification, but not without right. To the extent that the way I actually go on depends on my primitive inclination, it is a brute fact according to Kripke. The question is, however, whether Kripke is entitled to claim that going on on the basis of primitive inclinations is going on "rightfully" (*mit Recht*). To say that the agreement within a community is a brute fact is to say that my primitive inclinations are generally the same as those of others in my community. *My* meaning addition by '+' is not a brute fact, presumably, since it is explicable or justifiable in terms of my being part of a certain community having certain practices and my responding in certain ways in certain situations. As it turns out, digging down to the level of brute facts is fatal for the sceptical solution's attempt to preserve the normativity of meaning (see below).

The second concept, that of form of life, is intimately linked with the first. Agreement is "agreement not in opinions but in form of life" according to (241), and thus

Kripke characterises a form of life as "the set of responses in which we agree and the way they interweave with our activities" (p. 96). Individuals using the symbol '+' in a quus-like way would be judged to belong to a different form of life and would be quite incomprehensible to us. To underscore this, Kripke cites *PI*, p. 223: "If a lion could talk, we could not understand him." It is important to take note of the fact that if agreement is a brute fact, so is our sharing a form of life.

The third concept Kripke cites is that of criteria. Following him, I shall not focus on an analysis of the notion of criterion in Wittgenstein but rather on its role in the Kripkensteinian picture. Criteria play a crucial part in the game of concept attribution, since if my rule-following is necessarily subject to correction, others must have criteria by which to judge my actions. It is only in virtue of such outward criteria that others can verify whether an individual's responses agree with their own, and this verification or checkability, as Kripke calls it, is essential. "Wittgenstein's solution to his problem, he writes, depends on agreement, and on *checkability - on one person's ability to test whether another uses the term as he does*" (emphasis added). And a few pages later, "The solution turns on the idea that each person who claims to be following a rule can be checked by others" (p. 101). Whereas the sceptical paradox cast into doubt the very possibility of linguistic expression, it appears that the proposed solution ultimately grounds that possibility on the notion of checkability or verification. For the premise that linguistic expression depends on the possibility of getting it right or wrong, i.e. on normativity, now looks to be reduced to the possibility of checking whether some individual responds in accordance with the inclinations of whoever is evaluating that individual's rule-following.

This allows Kripke to interpret the private language argument as a corollary of his solution. In a footnote (n. 47, p. 60-2), he distinguishes this interpretation from one that views the argument as turning on the correct identification of one's sensations. On the latter reading, private language is claimed to be impossible because the private linguist has no means of verifying that she is correctly identifying or interpreting her inner sensations. How can she know that the sensation she is experiencing now and believes to be the same

as the sensation she called 'E' yesterday is indeed E? What justifies this belief? The private linguist, on this reading, is thought to need outside help in order to be to correctly identify E. This version of the argument quickly runs into the following objection. The veracity of the report of an external event observed "privately" by a single observer is usually not questioned. If, for instance, I return from a camping trip and report having sighted a bear while there was no one else within a hundred miles, people are unlikely to question the accuracy of this report. Now, if we grant my ability to thus correctly identify external objects and events, that are thus privately observed, why should we not also grant the ability to correctly identify our own internal sensations? Conversely, if I cannot correctly identify my inner sensations, how can I identify sense data of external objects? Hence the burden of proof is on the proponent of this version of the private language argument to show that internal sensations present a special problem here. The argument in this form fails because the appeal to outside help in no way gets us out of the difficulty of correct identification or interpretation. If the distinction between internal and external sensations cannot be maintained, how is the would-be private linguist to know that she is correctly interpreting the external, independent check on her own identifications?

Kripke claims that his version of the argument does not take the notion of identification for granted and is in fact addressing this very question. To be sure, inasmuch as Kripke presents the Wittgensteinian sceptic as having shown all language to be impossible and sees the force of the private language argument not as proving private language to be impossible, but as querying how *any language* is possible at all, he intertwines this issue with the possibility of linguistic expression itself. Yet, although Kripke's version of the private language argument does not hinge on the question of correct identification of sensations, it nonetheless depends on the possibility of verification, albeit a verification that transcends the distinction between inner and outer sense data.

It is possible, however, to interpret the private language argument so as to avoid the issue of checkability altogether. The following is an adumbration of what I shall call

the expressibility interpretation of the argument which completely eschews the issue of verification to concentrate instead on the embeddedness of language in a context. A private language is a language containing one or more lexical items which can be understood and used by only one speaker and which that speaker cannot convey to anyone else. On the expressibility interpretation, the private language argument shows that, paradoxically, nothing could be said, nothing be *articulated* in such a language. If one were trying to come up with a private language, one might stipulate that its terms refer to 'private' items the paradigm example of which would be a private sensation. The very first stumbling block is the question of how words could refer to such sensations at all. What Wittgenstein entertains at (257) is the possibility that an individual coin a term for a private sensation in isolation from all other language. The attempt to do this fails because it turns out to be impossible to assign meaning to a putative private word, not because of a lack of independent verification but because of a lack of context. The impossibility in articulating even a single item of private vocabulary stems from the fact that any such articulation already requires a good amount of stage setting.

> When one says "He gave a name to his sensation" one forgets that a great deal of stage-setting in the language is presupposed if the mere act of naming is to make sense. (257)

In the radical private language case, there simply is not enough context to fix the meaning of words. Every term one thinks of using in a definition is parasitic on ordinary, already existing language. As soon as one calls some term 'E' the sign of some private sensation E, one uses words such as 'sign', 'sensation' etc. which are part of a publicly shared language (261). In other words, in order for 'E' to function as a name referring to the private sensation, or to refer to anything at all for that matter, it must interrelate with a host of other terms. A private language, as defined above, prohibits such interrelatedness. Because language functions as a web, as soon as 'E' depends on other terms belonging to public language, it itself becomes accessible, *via* the public language, not only to the private linguist but to others as well. If 'E' does not interrelate with other terms of the language, the private linguist cannot in any meaningful way be said to interpret her private

semantic items nor the ostensive definitions she might use to give them meaning. Indeed, she cannot even get so far as to formulate any such definitions. In the end, the private linguist is reduced to inarticulate sound, and even that will then be part of a language game to be described (261). Hence there is no way of escaping from public language into a private, solipsistic sphere. Language is sharable in principle, not just in practice. To view the private language argument in these terms is to shift the issue of linguistic expressibility entirely away from the question of checkability. In fact, the question of verifying whether another person's responses agree with one's own is rendered virtually irrelevant to the point.

To this, Kripke can retort that checkability, though it may not be the only essential feature of language, is at least equally necessary for the possibility of linguistic expression as its embeddedness in a context. Furthermore, he can argue that since his concern is normativity, i.e. the question of there being a right and wrong, checkability is the more relevant feature. After all, if we cannot tell what rule someone is applying, how can we tell whether the way he is applying it is right? - I do not want to address this line of defence directly, since my intention in sketching the expressibility interpretation at this point is merely to clear the ground for the alternative account of normativity presented in chapter 4 by introducing the idea that meaning is determined by context, i.e. by the relation of one term with other terms of a language.

At any rate, it is impossible to do the argument against private language justice, let alone to survey the immense secondary and tertiary literature in this essay. Perhaps I have already belaboured it too much, given that it is tangential to my central thesis concerning the inadequacy of Kripke's solution. I do, however, want to mention McDowell's disagreement with Kripke over the argument's role in the overall picture, insofar as this disagreement indicates why the emphasis on checkability spells trouble for Kripke's solution. Both consider the private language argument a corollary, but whereas for Kripke it follows from the replacement of truth conditions with assertibility conditions, McDowell sees it as a result of the realisation that rule-following is a practice. He

furthermore maintains that the publicity of language emerges as "the condition of the possibility of rejecting the assimilation of understanding to interpretation" and not, as for Kripke's Wittgenstein as the only alternative left, given that we cannot make sense of meaning in the context of a single individual.[6] Thus, although McDowell allows that Kripkenstein's insistence on the publicity of language is roughly Wittgensteinian in spirit,[7] he connects the private language argument with the non-interpretive conception of the understanding, and this implies steering away from checkability. Although McDowell makes no mention of the latter notion, he does criticise anti-realists for discarding the idea that grasping a rule is the grasping of a "ratification-independent pattern". It seems fair to say that ratification-dependence of rule-following and of concept attribution in general is a version of checkability.

McDowell sees the anti-realist argument as a *modus tollens* containing the following premises.[8] (i) If the possession of a concept were correctly conceived as the grasp of a (ratification-independent) pattern, then no one could know how someone else understands an expression. Furthermore, this 'pattern' idea goes hand in hand with what he calls an idiolectic conception of the understanding, i.e. one that places meaning in the head - or at least in the individual. But (ii) the sceptical paradox shows that "the idea of knowledge of idiolectic meaning is an illusion". That is, we cannot make sense of meaning in the context of a single individual. Therefore, the anti-realist concludes (iii) the grasp of a concept cannot be the grasp of a ratification-independent pattern. However, McDowell argues that giving up this pattern idea entails giving up the notion of objectivity as well because it leaves no room for a distinction between actually being subject to norms and meaning something by one's words and *the illusion* of doing so.[9]

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[6] McDowell, *op. cit.*, p. 356.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 342.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 345.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 348.

In the remainder of this chapter I want to show how Kripke's solution winds up with this position and why this is undesirable. To this end I now turn to the relationship between the individual and the community, which has been the topic of much of the critical discussion of *WRPL*. At the heart of the matter lies the question whether the community is in the same predicament as the individual. What is the nature of the Kripkensteinian community? Can it ground the right kind of normativity? If the community is in the same predicament as the individual, then, while an individual herself may be said to be subject to the standards of the community, the community itself has no standards to meet, no norms by which to abide. Hence it follows rules just as blindly as the individual considered in isolation.

Kripke denies that the sceptical problem can be extended to apply to the community, but we must be careful to understand what he means by this. He explicitly disavows the idea that what he sees as Wittgenstein's theory amounts to a community-wide version of the dispositional account according to which

> for any *m* and *n*, the value of the function we mean by 'plus', *is* (by definition) the value that (nearly) all the linguistic community would give as the answer (p. 111).

Such a theory would be open to the same type of criticism as the individual version, but it would be a truth-conditional rather than an assertibilist theory and therefore not admissible in the Wittgensteinian framework. More importantly, Kripke does not consider it to be the task of the sceptical solution to account for the practices of the community as being themselves subject to norms. What is at issue for him is the application of norms to an individual; what the community does is "just the way we go on". Therefore he can afford to dismiss the difficulty in even entertaining the possibility that the community might always be wrong:

> It *is* hard to formulate such a doubt within Wittgenstein's framework since it looks like a question, whether, as a matter of 'fact', we might always be wrong; and there is no such fact (p. 146, note 87).

Yet if there is no such fact, does it not follow that we can no longer speak of being right or wrong at all, and must therefore resign ourselves to the sceptical problem at the level

of the community?

Simon Blackburn argues in his paper "The Individual Strikes Back"[10] that the community is in the same boat as the individual. His thesis is that if there is no difference between being right and thinking she is right for the individual in isolation, then neither is there a difference for the community between its seeing itself to have a unified practice and actually having such a practice.[11] Again, as with Wright's objection earlier, this need not trouble Kripke who can happily grant that this is in fact part of his solution. While, for reasons yet to be stated, it is correct to challenge Kripke on this point, I nonetheless disagree with Blackburn concerning his endorsement of the possibility of a private practice and hence of private rule-following. Blackburn uses a Robinson Crusoe solving a rubicks cube alone on his island as an example of a private rule follower. In doing so, however, he misses the significance of Kripke's distinction between considering an individual *in isolation* and considering a physically isolated individual (p. 110). Blackburn readily agrees that if we are to do the thought experiment, we have to apply normal, community-wide standards to Robinson. Since that would be true of any situation we might want to describe, Blackburn does not think this precludes us from considering Crusoe in isolation. It is indeed true that insofar as we want to make judgements about anything, we have to apply our standards to it. But that is just the point. As soon as we attribute a given concept, such as the formula to solve the rubicks cube, to someone, that concept cannot be part of any private language. We cannot get out of our language to consider the private linguist. This is what bedevils the very possibility of talking about private language. Kripke - in light of his reading of the private language argument - cannot say that we "are always already in language" or that words are always already meaningful to us; such meaningfulness is not at issue for him. Nevertheless, that is how the "in isolation" clause must be cashed out in the end if the private language

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[10] *Synthese 58* (1984), pp. 281-301.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 295.

argument is to be upheld.

The failure of Blackburn's objection notwithstanding, there are other reasons for pursuing the question of whether the community is or ought to be subject to normativity and whether the sceptical problem reemerges at the communal level. Given that insofar as he feels there is a need to answer this question at all, Kripke answers it negatively, we must now ask whether the consequences of this attitude are acceptable. The crucial difficulty lies in the fact that the denial or reduction of a normativity that applies to the community as well as to its members, i.e. the denial of normativity *tout court*, renders null and void Kripke's claim to preserve normativity for the individual. There are two related reasons for this. One is the reductionist element in Kripke I have already alluded to. The other is that although the sceptical solution denies the cogency of considering the individual in isolation in favour of a communal conception of rule-following and understanding and by placing the individual in a community of rule-followers claims to save the applicability of normativity for the individual, its operant notion of understanding remains idiolectic. This despite the fact that the reduction of a shared language to a "set of precariously corresponding idiolects"[12] is precisely what the introduction of the community is supposed to circumvent.

Before expanding on this, I wish to discuss the problems inherent in Kripke's reduction of the notion of normativity for the community to the primitive inclinations of (the majority of) the individual members of that community - which in effect amounts to eliminating normativity altogether. For Kripke, there is no right or wrong for the community above and beyond the way it or its individual members actually go on. He has it that Jones's

> inclinations (both [his] general inclination that he has 'got it' and his particular inclination to give particular answers in particular addition problems) are to be regarded as primitive. They are not to be justified in terms of Jones' ability to interpret his own intentions or anything else (p. 90).

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[12] McDowell, *op. cit.*, p. 348-9.

Making the inclinations of the individual primitive in this sense, scuttles the whole salvaging operation of introducing the assertibilist framework. For it means that despite the earlier assurance that his solution leads us to look for justification elsewhere, Kripke now finds himself back at the sceptic's end of the line where he runs out of *all* justifications and hits the level of brute behavioural reactions.

No doubt a defender of the Kripkean solution is chomping at the bit to remind us of crucial role played by the notion of agreement. The 'brute fact' that the actual community is roughly uniform in its practices is supposed to prevent a scenario where each rule follower does as she or he in inclined and passes judgement on all others based on her or his own inclinations. Yet brute agreement will hardly suffice to do the job. Even supposing that meaning addition by '+' does rest on the brute fact of agreement, the sense in which such agreement can be considered normative is difficult to discern. For such agreement is *contingent*. In reducing the agreement among a community sharing a form of life to a brute fact, Kripke reduces normativity to the brute inclinations of the members of that community. If agreement is simply a brute fact, then it is agreement in primitive inclinations, and at their level we can no longer speak of being wrong or right. Therefore, there is no normativity at this level. By digging down to the level of 'brute' facts, Kripke places "the bedrock lower than it actually is"[13] and thereby scotches any chance of accounting for normativity, and hence for meaning. Yet, to quote McDowell again, "we must prevent the leaching out of norms from our picture of bedrock, from our picture, that is, of how things are at the deepest level at which we may sensibly contemplate the place of language in the world".[14] In other words, if we want to uphold the normativity of language, we must not reduce language to primitive inclinations or propensities, even if we try to buttress these by making them subject to correction by others. If we want to maintain talk of brute facts, then normativity itself (and hence

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[13] The metaphor is McDowell's.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 341.

meaning) must be seen as such a brute fact, not explicable in terms of anything more basic. For the task of somehow reconstituting meaning, and thereby normativity, from primitive inclinations is hopeless. And unless we can successfully reconstitute meaning or unless we refuse to reduce it in the first place, the Kripkensteinian sceptic wins the day.

The idiolectic (or monological) conception of the understanding is not unrelated to the reduction of rule-following to primitive inclinations and manifests itself in Kripke's definition of checkability as the ability of *one* person to check another's responses, for example. Furthermore, his account of how assertibility conditions are discerned begins with examples relating not an individual and the community, but two individuals, e.g. the teacher and the child, me and Jones, Smith and Jones. It is Smith *the individual* who judges whether Jones is following addition or not and that he does so only after Jones's inclinations have been in agreement with his own in sufficient many cases. Jones, Kripke writes,

> 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 (p. 90).

The ensuing question is what empowers Smith and others to correct Jones. The above passage continues as follows,

> Smith need *not* accept Jones's authority on these matters: *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, or, if they occasionally disagree, he can interpret Jones as at least following the proper procedure. ... In all this, Smith's inclinations are regarded as just as primitive as Jones's. In no way does Smith test directly whether Jones may have in his head some rule agreeing with the one in Smith's head. Rather the point is that if, in enough concrete cases, Jones's inclinations agree with Smith's, Smith will judge that Jones in indeed following the rule for addition (p. 90-1).

Whence, we may ask, does Smith get the authority to judge Jones? What are the communal norms to which Smith, but not Jones, has access, in the sense that the former but not the latter abides by them and can judge the latter's performance in virtue of them? Or, to put it another way, supposing Smith is considered an expert on addition, what

makes him an expert? What is it in virtue of which Smith is actually right rather than just "feels" that he is? Does Jones not have just as much right to correct Smith, to judge his rule-following, as *vice-versa*? Kripke would answer the last question affirmatively, adding that which if any of them is right depends on how they are judged by others in turn.[15] However, if that is the case and if Smith's judgement of Jones does not rest on any sort of authority but merely on his interpretive ability to ascribe to others the same meanings he ascribes to himself, then his judgement cannot be normative. And if his judgement is not normative, why should that of others who judge him be thus? Finally, if no single judgement is normative, how can normativity spring from an aggregate of such judgements? Since we cannot continue to defer to the responses and judgements of others indefinitely, how do we ever attain the kind of normativity that is binding for the individual, let alone for the community? Although McDowell himself claims that "focusing on the individual in isolation from any linguistic community is not the way we fall into [the paradox]"[16] because he wants to stress the assimilation of the understanding to interpretation as the cause, the crucial point is that once we do address the problem in terms of idiolectic understanding, the option of a non-idiolectic understanding and of a communally shared language in McDowell's sense, to be outlined in chapter 4, is no longer available. All that one can salvage is the surrogate provided by our openness to correction by others. However, this yields a community that is reduced to a mere aggregate of individuals or, as McDowell puts it, to

> a picture of human beings vocalizing in certain ways in response to objects, with this behaviour (no doubt) accompanied by 'inner' phenomena as feelings of constraint or convictions of rightness of what they are saying. There are presumably correspondences in the propensities of fellow members of a linguistic community to vocalize, and to feel comfortable in doing so, which are unsurprising in the light of their belonging to a single species, together with similarities in the training that gave them the propensities. But at the basic level there is no question of shared commitments - of the behaviour, and the associated aspects of the streams of consciousness, being

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[15] This line of defense was pointed out to me by David Davies.

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 343.

subject to the authority of anything outside themselves.[17]

While I return to the distinction between idiolectic and communal understanding at greater length in the next chapter, the purpose of the following example is to illustrate very briefly what is involved in the latter. If John tells Jane that the has just returned from a fabulous holiday, she does not have to interpret his utterance; the meaning of his words is directly available to her. This is essentially because they are engaged in a conversation, a dialogue, together. Their exchange could be interpreted as "mere" communication, as the transfer of information, but even in a case like this, the communicatory function of John's utterance can be secondary, as for example if they have not seen each other for a long time and John is endeavouring to reestablish the rapport they shared previously. Even if John's primary intention were to communicate this information to Jane, such communication could not take place without their engaging in a dialogue at the same time - or if it did, it would more like two computers rather than two people speaking. For what happens in conversation is the continual creation of "public space",[18] of a sphere in which we interact and in which the meanings of others, not to mention our own, are directly available to us with no need for mediating interpretations. Even McDowell acknowledges this non-idiolectic (or dialogical) kind of understanding somewhat obliquely by subtly shifting form the consideration of rule-following to that of following an order. Clearly it is much more difficult to think of the latter in anything other than dialogical terms. While we have a tendency to think of a rule as having some kind of autonomy, as dictating a certain course of action independently of us, an order is usually associated with or implies its issuer. Even the giving of an order to oneself is commonly construed as a pseudo-dialogue.

As for Kripke, although he purports to abandon the idiolectic model of the subject and of her understanding and admits that meaning is not explicable in terms of the states

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[17] *Ibid.*, p. 336.

[18] My use of the term stems from Charles Taylor, "Theories of Meaning", *Human Agency and the Self*, Cambridge University Press, 1985, pp. 259-260.

of the individual (this is the fall-out of the sceptical paradox), his solution completely overlooks the dialogical dimension of language. One might say he admits that Jones's meaning addition by '+' is not in his head, only to relocate it in Smith's. This is corroborated by the fact that whereas Jones acts on the basis of his primitive inclinations, Smith is seen as *interpreting* these in order to determine what Jones means. Conceding this much, however, seems to land us back in the sceptical paradox.

But why should the sceptic not win the day? Why should we resist giving up normativity for the community and bother with even trying to make its individual members subject to communal standards? What is wrong with the kind of dismal picture McDowell paints? One reason against throwing in the towel to the sceptic is that communal practice cannot always be appealed to as the ultimate standard of correctness. Consider the situation of the community *vis-à-vis* new cases of applying a rule. Eventually the community has to face novel cases just as '68 + 57' was *ex hypothesi* a novel case for the individual. In such instances, individuals usually extrapolate from the community's practice. In the Kripkensteinian framework, there is no room for taking such extrapolations to be normatively guided in any sense, no matter what "feelings of constraint" we may have when we act. We simply go on one way rather than another. The fact that most of us happen to go on the same way (or would do so if confronted with the same situation) is contingent, although not surprising since we happen to be members of the same species. Just as there is nothing intrinsically right or wrong about the fact that we cannot function without sleep or the fact that wolves devour sheep, there is ultimately nothing normative about how someone should continue the series "9994, 9996, 9998, 10000". For all that our practices today apparently dictate, tomorrow it may turn out that we shall all be inclined to answer "10003" instead of "10002"! There is no right or wrong over and above how we go on.[19] Kripke may respond that novel cases going

[19] Note that once we do take a step in one direction, this then becomes part of communal practice and can subsequently be invoked as a standard of correctness by which others ought to abide.

beyond communal practice pose no problem for him, that our coping with new cases is "simply the way we go on". However, he must then also be willing to abandon the idea that when individuals execute such extrapolations, they are guided by normativity. Their desire to go on the right way is no more than a projection of their psychological state onto the world.

Yet were it not for such extrapolation, it is difficult to see how communal practice could evolve, i.e. how communal standards could change. While such evolution does not occur in the case of addition (with the exception perhaps of what goes on in higher mathematics), there are other rules, particularly social or moral conventions, that clearly do change over time. In certain circumstances we want to correct the accepted practice of a given community, to change, in other words, the very standards of correctness. This is hardly best described as simply going on; rather it often involves a great deal of deliberation and possibly controversy among members of the community. Such deliberation presupposes that there is a right way to go on, even though no public norms have been institutionalised. Finally, the appeal to "communal standards", rather than explaining how normativity is established, presupposes it. Without the presupposition that there is a right and wrong, we could not so much as begin to talk about the criteria that are constitutive of such norms, be they communal practices, truth-conditions, or whatever. And concerning this kind of normativity, which might perhaps be called transcendental, Kripke says nothing.[20]

Kripke's solution, then, lacks the sense that the way we do go on as a matter of fact is the *right* way to go on. He fails to rehabilitate that sense not because he remains in the clutches of the sceptical paradox, but because ultimately, his solution reduces our actions to primitive inclinations, thus fragmenting the community and reducing our rule-following to 'mere' behaviour rather than preserving it as a normative practice. Perhaps

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[20] The line of argument I am suggesting here is much like that taken by Hilary Putnam with regard to rationality in his *Reason, Truth and History* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981, pp. 222), see especially chapters 5-7.

the very attempt to argue against the view that as far as addition is concerned, there is no justification for the fact that we simply go on one way rather than another will appear futile to many. The problem may lie in the choice of example. Addition is so deeply engrained in our form of life, we follow the rule so automatically, that although on one hand we think of it as a paradigm of a constraining rule, it seems, on the other, that we "just do it" instinctively. And of course at the level of instinct, there are no norms.

It is difficult, so as not to say impossible, to go much beyond these criticisms of Kripke's solution without adopting a radically different perspective on language. While an elaboration of such a perspective is beyond the scope of the present context, I shall sketch some of its features in the final chapter and explore a "straight" alternative to the sceptical solution, one which does not reduce norms or eliminate them from our picture of what constitutes a form of life. This alternative is centered around the notion of practice and draws on the aspect of the private language argument stressed by the expressibility interpretation and quite neglected by Kripke, namely the fact that all language is meaningful only in some context, against a background of which we have an immediate understanding.

4. The Background and Practice of Rule-Following

We have seen how devastating the sceptical paradox, and how ill-fated Kripke's sceptical solution is. As I indicated in the introduction, Kripke's first mistake is to assume that the only available straight solution to his paradox would be to provide a fact *about the individual*, justifying her going on in one way rather than another. A viable alternative conception of rule-following that can give rise to a straight rather than merely a sceptical solution must therefore begin even before the paradox can be formulated in such terms. As a result, it will yield a completely different view from Kripke's not only of language but also of what it means for justifications to run out. Thus far, however, all we have in the way of a viable alternative are a number of titillating metaphors and hints that, at best, constitute a very programmatic answer to the sceptical problem. At the centre of this programme, it seems, stands the pronouncement that rule-following is a practice - a claim that is virtually commonplace in the literature, but is rarely expanded upon.[1] The aim of the present chapter, therefore, is to examine the notion of practice in order to shed some light on what is involved in non-interpretive understanding. I shall argue that in addition to there being a practice of rule-following, agents must have a background understanding not only of that practice but of a host of other practices that interweave with it and make up our "form of life".

McDowell's own account of "how the programme could be executed"[2] is sparse, to say the least - which is not overly surprising given that the alternative solution requires a radically different perspective on language and normativity. Setting out the differences between McDowell and Kripke's views provides a suitable starting point for a sketch of this alternative as well as allowing to take care of the as yet unfinished business of idiolectic understanding. To recapitulate, McDowell's main contention is that Kripke acquiesces in the assimilation of understanding to interpretation. Yet McDowell, as much

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[1] Baker and Hacker place great emphasis on this claim without ever elaborating on it substantively, *op. cit.*

[2] McDowell, *op. cit.*, p. 342.

as Kripke, cites passages from the *PI* to the effect that we follow rules blindly, that agreement in forms of life cannot be justified, that we act without justification but not without right, and so on. So it might appear as though his "non-interpretive understanding" is not substantially different from Kripke's picture of what it is for us to "just go on". After all, as we have seen, Kripke, too, claims to reject the sceptical paradox. However, Kripke's "just going on" applies to the actions of an individual rule-follower. Thus recall that Smith is described by Kripke as *interpreting* Jones to be following addition (p. 90), indicating that Smith's understanding of Jones is interpretive. McDowell's non-interpretive understanding, on the other hand, concerns our access to other minds. Hence a solution in terms of such understanding requires not just that an individual's own "going on", but also her understanding of others be non-interpretive.

One feature of non-interpretive understanding that is crucially lacking in Kripke's account is the direct availability of that in which the meaning of others consists. This notion, which despite the earlier example of John and Jane may still appear mysterious, underwrites the public or communal character of language and emerges as follows. McDowell's rejection of checkability goes hand in hand with his criticism of another anti-realist premise, namely the so-called manifestation requirement according to which one can be said to have an understanding of certain concepts only if one manifests such understanding. This in itself McDowell leaves unchallenged. What he does take issue with is the condition that the behaviour that is to count as such a manifestation to others be characterisable in terms other than those of the language or concepts in question.[3] In effect, this amounts to the Kripkean sceptic's demand that whatever fact we cite to justify our meaning addition must not presuppose our meaning addition. Contrary to this, McDowell proposes that what a speaker manifests to others

> must be characterizable in terms of the contents of utterances (the thoughts they express). Accordingly, command of the language is needed in order

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 347.

to be in direct contact with that in which someone's meaning consists.[4]

What McDowell is gesturing at by means of the notion of direct contact with the meaning of others is a picture of understanding as well as of language that is not idiolectic but communal or public, not just in the sense that we can check what others mean by looking at their behaviour, but in the sense that language creates what I referred to as "public space" earlier. On such a picture, we do not make our meanings available to just anyone; command of the language is required.

> The shared command of a language equips us to know one another's meaning without needing to arrive at that knowledge by interpretation, because it equips us to hear someone else's meaning in his words.[5]

McDowell's point, I take it, is that the language we speak is *ours* and that meaning cannot be analysed from the perspective of a detached observer. Hence, shared membership in a linguistic community is not "a matter of matching in aspects of an exterior that we present to anyone whatever" as it is for Kripke, but "equips us to make our minds available to one another with a different exterior from that which we present to outsiders".[6]

This is significantly different from Kripke's direct accessibility requirement noted in chapter 1. The reader will recall that the issue there was the direct accessibility of *facts about me*. Now the issue is the direct accessibility of *facts about others*. And the only such facts that are directly accessible to me on Kripke's account are behavioural. It is on the basis of the *behaviour* of others, their responses to given addition problems etc. that I am justified in attributing the concept of addition to them. Thus meaning arises only at this second stage. To be sure, in order to avoid reducing language to a set of corresponding idiolects, the anti-realist will argue that their behaving in this or that way simply *is* for them to mean addition. But then she renounces the notion that following a

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[4] *Ibid.*, p. 348.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 350.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 350.

rule commits one to following "a shared pattern extending into the future".[7] That is, if Smith's and Jones' meaning the same thing by '+' consists in their responding the same way *now*, this in no way commits them to agreeing in their responses and hence meaning the same by '+' tomorrow. This is the result of what McDowell calls "placing meaning on the surface" - the flip side of the placing bedrock lower than it is. He diagnoses this attitude as motivated by the desire to circumvent a semantics according to which we assign meanings to utterances of other speakers of our language by forming hypotheses about "something concealed behind the surface"[8] of their linguistic behaviour. On the latter view, our knowledge of the meaning of others is inductive. Brought to its logical conclusion, this yields a picture of a shared language as, at best, a set of "precariously corresponding idiolects" - and this the anti-realist is striving to avoid. But, McDowell claims, she wrongly places meaning on the surface of linguistic behaviour and then resorts to talk of propensities or, in Kripke's case, of primitive inclinations to further explain that behaviour. These primitive inclinations are at best explicable in terms of cause and effect but certainly not in any normative terms related to what the individuals in question *mean*. Therefore the claim that responding in a certain way in observed instances simply *is* to follow addition acquires the reductivist flavour discussed in the preceding chapter. Moreover, even if such a reductivist interpretation could be resisted, the resulting picture of what it means to share a language, i.e. the picture of a linguistic community, is one of corresponding linguistic dispositions and is therefore still idiolectic rather than truly communal, despite Kripke's alleged concession that "meanings are not in the head". While this conclusion in itself is correct, it ought to be clear by now that we must conceive of this in different terms from Kripke's.

This is where the slogan that rule-following is a practice comes into play. Indeed, this slogan is supposed to be the key to an account of how grasping a rule is not an

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[7] *Ibid.*, p. 349.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 347.

interpretation. Accordingly, also, learning a language is not merely "the acquisition of linguistic propensities describable without the use of the notion of meaning", but as "the initiation to a custom". Notwithstanding, McDowell apparently stops at this point, and Kripke has still less to say on the subject of practice. In an effort to go further than either Kripke or McDowell, I want to begin by examining a notion crucial to any account of practice, namely that of background understanding.

According to Wittgenstein, to obey a rule is to obey it blindly (219). Kripke's sceptic makes the same claim, adding that, in the absence of a justification, a person's rule-following is a stab in the dark (p. 17). However, there are two ways of cashing out the blindness metaphor. Conjoining it with that of stabbing into the dark, we get a picture of a helpless and frustrated subject acting quite arbitrarily. In contrast, we can think of following a rule blindly in the sense in which a blind person knows her way around and is capable of coping with the world. One might say, we have the capacity to follow rules with our eyes closed - the way we know where to grasp for the tooth brush first thing in the morning. On this view, to say that we follow rules blindly is not to say that we need a white cane or a guide dog to tell us how to follow a rule, in other words, we do not need rules for applying rules nor interpretations nor representations in our mind in order to be able to follow rules. Rather it means that despite the lack of independent justification we have a certain assurance, another kind of sight that allows us to go on unhesitatingly.[9] Arguably, such talk of 'sight' might be considered un-Wittgensteinian. For one, the attempt to give an account of this sight or of what I shall refer to as background understanding contravenes Wittgenstein's continued allegiance to his ineffability thesis already expressed in the *Tractatus*. In addition, there are passages, such as the following from *On Certainty*[10], that seem to corroborate a Kripkean interpretation that we

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[9] In Martin Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* (Max Niemeyer Verlag, Tübingen, 1986), this is referred to as *Umsicht* or "circumspection".

[10] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1979). References to the numbered sections of this work will henceforth be preceded by OC.

"just go on".

> Giving grounds, ... justifying the evidence, comes to an end; - but the end is not certain propositions' striking us immediately as true, i.e. it is not a kind of *seeing* on our part; it is our *acting*, which lies at the bottom of the language-game (*OC* 204).

However, the dismissal of the immediate seeing of truth does not preclude the admissibility of another kind of sight requisite for acting, a sight of which we are virtually unaware most of the time because we are absorbed in our activity.[11] And there are others that suggests Wittgenstein was sympathetic to a view that holds this ability to be more than just properly channelled primitive inclinations. While he is generally reticent to speak of our having knowledge unless we can produce grounds for it (e.g. *OC* 484), he clearly leaves room for a non-explicit knowledge in passages such as this one:

> Of course I do not think to myself "The earth already existed for some time before my birth", but do I *know* it any the less? Don't I show that I know it by always drawing its consequences? (*OC* 397)

And "drawing the consequences" means acting in accordance with the knowledge or on the presupposition that the earth has existed before my birth. That knowledge claim itself is unlikely to be asserted except in rather unusual circumstances; normally it is not articulated but part of our background understanding, which we share with others. Yet the mere fact that is *can* be articulated is significant to the extent that such articulation can serve as the justification for other knowledge claims, attributions of meanings etc. The relevance of this to Kripke's sceptical puzzle will become clearer below.

In his outline of the structure of the *PI*, Kripke mentions the topic of ostensive definitions, maintaining that here, too, the central problem is the sceptical paradox (p. 82-3). He is quite correct in pointing out the parallels in the indeterminacy of rules and ostensive definitions respectively:

> Wittgenstein emphasizes that ostensive definitions are always in principle capable of being misunderstood, even the ostensive definition of a color word such as 'sepia'. How someone understands the word is exhibited in

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[11] McDowell incidentally uses this passage to illustrate the use of expressions without justification, but he stresses that the temptation to read this as showing that at bedrock level there is only verbal behaviour and feelings of constraint must be resisted. *Op. cit.*, p. 341.

> the way someone goes on... One may go on in the right way given a purely minimal explanation, while on the other hand one may go on in another way no matter how many clarifications are added, since these too can be misunderstood (a rule for interpreting a rule again; see especially (28-29) (p. 83).

Just as rules, the essential function of which it is to guide our future actions, paradoxically appear not to be able to fulfil this function, so ostensive definitions on the one hand count as the most straight-forward sorts of definitions we can give, while on the other, it is a mystery how they function at all; as Kripke points out, they are in principle liable to be interpreted in any number of ways. It seems that the "definition" by itself underdetermines what the speaker means.

In section (31) of the *PI*, Wittgenstein uses the example of the ostensive definition of a chess figure to show that such definitions can only be understood if "a place has already been prepared for them". He is not alluding in this instance to the fact that a particular figure can only function as a king because there are other figures functioning as pawns, knights, and rooks, although in fact, this theme that language is meaningful only in a context pervades much of the *PI* and is also made explicit in *On Certainty* (e.g. *OC* 350). Instead what he has in mind is the fact that one can only understand the meaning of the statement "This figure is the king" if one already knows the concept of a 'figure' in a 'game'. Where such background understanding is missing, the ostensive definition will fail to fulfil its purpose or even be meaningless. Thus, as Wittgenstein points out, one cannot explain the use of a chess figure by merely ostensively defining it as the king. Such an ostensive definition would be useless unless followed by further explanation of the role of the piece in the game, unless one's interlocutor already knows that role and merely does not know the name of the piece, or some other such circumstance (31). While the discussion of ostensive definitions in the *PI* is a paradigm illustration of the need of context, it amplifies the insight of the private language argument as outlined in the preceding chapter. Not only is the meaning of any term determined by its place in a web of other terms and meanings, but the presence of language implies that of a language user to whom an understanding of the context, of the web of meanings must be attributed.

A possible objection to this might seek to deny the need for context and background understanding altogether. Does the above not misrepresent the character of ostensive definitions and their functions? After all, is an ostensive definition not used to *give* the meaning of a word? How can it be necessary that one already understand what is being pointed at? By assuming that meaning can indeed be given to expressions independently of the context in which they are used, or at least independently of other semantic items, however, this objection fails to see precisely the point in contention. Suppose Claire is teaching her daughter Tina colour words and points at blotches of a certain colour and explains, "That is red". If Tina understands the definition correctly, she grasps the meaning of the word 'red' and will in future apply that word to red objects. But how is Tina to know that 'red' refers to the colour of the leaf and not to its shape or, for that matter, to the kind of tree on which it hangs?[12] She must at least already know what is being pointed at and what pointing is in order to understand; she must share certain background knowledge such as that of the concept of colour with her mother. Even if Tina makes a mistake in her subsequent application of 'red', the shared background is presupposed in order for any communication or correction, for that matter, to be possible.

This case sharply contrasts with Kripke's example of Smith and Jones where no such assumption was made in order for Smith to judge Jones's rule-following. The contrast stems from the difference between Kripke's idiolectic conception of the understanding and the dialogical or communal conception outlined above. Kripke does not need to assume that there is a background understanding shared by Smith and Jones because what is at issue for him is not the direct availability of the meanings of others or communication, let alone conversation. Instead, his focus is on checkability, on consensus and, ultimately, on brute conformity. As we have seen, Smith judges Jones' putative rule-

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[12] Note the parallels between this 'inscrutability of reference' and Quine's now classic example of a linguist trying to interpret the natives' utterances of "gavagi". W.v.O. Quine, *Word and Object* (M.I.T. Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1960).

following strictly on the basis of his own primitive inclinations. That these are subject to correction by others merely means that he, too, must conform. The fact that Smith and Jones agree, that they mean the same thing by '+' for example, is reduced to their responding the same way to addition problems. Agreement thus amounts to being constituted or "wired up" the same way. Thus, for Kripke, to run out of justifications and reach bedrock is to reach the level of brute behaviour. Hence, our 'form of life' to him is just "the set of responses in which we happen to agree and the way in which these interweave with our activities".

Clearly, the idea of background understanding is closely linked with that of context. For if meaning is determined by context, then if a person is to grasp that meaning, she must have an understanding of that context. This understanding, however, cannot be fully described by merely attributing a knowledge of the relevant facts of the situation in question to the person; it must include a host of other facts *presupposed* by that situation. Or, to put it another way, recognising the 'relevant' facts itself presupposes further background understanding. This understanding can therefore never be exhaustively articulated or described, not just because such an enterprise is incredibly difficult or tedious, but because it is, quite simply, endless. The task of providing a definitive articulation of our background understanding is impossible *in principle* since whatever characterisation we give, it in turn will be intelligible only against some further background understanding which will depend on yet more background understanding, and so on. In any given situation, it may be useful to make the context explicit by providing such a characterisation - i.e. an interpretation - but many, perhaps most, situations do not require this.

The fact that background understanding cannot be made fully explicit and that its articulation is an endless task is not to be mistaken as new ammunition for the sceptic. We do not face a potentially infinite regress of contexts similar to the regress of representations or multitude of interpretations which loomed before us earlier. For we are no longer assimilating understanding to interpretation. To be sure, if necessary (say, if

certain facts are not determined in a given context), we have the option of resorting to a wider context. But this is not to say that a context can only be understood within a larger context which can only be understood within a still larger context etc. Rather, the background understanding *is part of* the context, even if we can never make it fully explicit. To borrow a phrase from Heidegger, it is "always already" there, not in the individual rule-follower's head, but manifest in the form of life shared by members of a linguistic community.

At this stage, it would seem, the disagreement between Kripke's solution and the proposed alternative boils down to differing conceptions of what is a *form of life* and of how Wittgenstein's claim that to imagine a language is to imagine a form of life (17) is to be cashed out. A precise characterisation of this term is notoriously elusive, and Wittgenstein in fact deplores his own use of it as "very badly expressed and probably badly thought as well" (*OC* 358.) In the same breath as bemoaning the inadequacy of the expression, however, he uses "form of life" to describe the certainty accompanying our utterance of the phrase 'I know' and contrasts it from "something akin to hastiness or superficiality". It would seem that this 'certainty and assurance' is roughly what I have been referring to as background understanding. The term 'form of life' is apt because it is broad enough to include both the social and biological aspects of our nature. Yet its very suitability seems to lie at the root of its inadequacy. For one, it can too easily be taken to refer to the brute responses to which we are inclined as members of a particular species. Kripke implicitly differentiates the set of responses in which we agree and which constitute our form of life from the activities with which they interweave. Thereby he conceives of 'form of life' very much in ethological terms rather than viewing both our responses and our customs as constitutive of it. As a result he is forced into a position where in articulating that picture, one eventually reaches a level at which normative notions can no longer be applied. The trouble is that the line where ethology ends and social practice begins is difficult if not impossible to draw. We are social creatures by nature; hence our customs are constitutive of our nature, yet at the same time our natural

traits condition the societies in which we find ourselves.[13]

Now if we see customs and practices as part of our form of life and incorporate communal background understanding in that notion, we get a much richer conception of form of life than Kripke's and can avoid the downward plunge to ethology. Since understanding itself is a normative notion, normativity cannot be eradicated from the bedrock upon which a form of life constituted (at least in part) by such understanding is built. In other words, to understand something is to grasp it correctly, to get it right. The discussion of ostensive definitions has shown that getting it right rests on a background understanding which the agent brings to any given situation. We have also seen that the latter can never be made fully explicit. Hence we can never get outside a frame where normativity applies; it is thus irreducible to brute inclinations. Consequently, running out of justifications and reaching bedrock cannot mean to hit the level of such brute impulses. What it does mean requires further elaboration of background understanding and of bedrock.

As I have already mentioned, an account of what constitutes context and our background understanding thereof, goes beyond what Wittgenstein would be willing to say on the matter. The following is therefore based on the writings of Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty which in turn have, at least in part, developed out of the Herderian and Humboldtian views of language mentioned in the introduction. It is also a summary of the points raised against Kripke thus far. As words are often thought of as tools for communication, a practice involving the use of tools in a more literal sense such as weaving may be especially enlightening if compared to the practice of addition. One of the weaver's tools is the shuttle. Its purpose it to carry the weft through the warp from one side of the loom to the other, thus creating the fabric. The following five points suggest parallels between the shuttle and the sign '+', between weaving and addition and language as a whole.

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[13] Cf. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, Gallimard, 1962.

(i) It is impossible to describe the function of the shuttle, which can be seen as analogous to the meaning of a word, without reference to the other tools involved in the task and even, tacitly or not, to the weaver herself. There can only be a shuttle if there is also a loom, wefts, warps etc. One item (the shuttle) gets its 'meaning' in virtue of its relation to other items. In isolation, it has no meaning and no use. As we can only grasp the function of the shuttle if we understand what a loom is, what the purpose of weaving is and so on, to know the function of one tool is to know a whole web, a totality of related tools. Similarly '+' is meaningful for us in the context of other symbols like '-', '=' and so on, all of which are interrelated. Moreover, we do not grasp them one by one; even in school, we are taught addition and subtraction concurrently.

(ii) The set of tools in turn can only be made sense of if seen as instrumental for the activity in question. In other words, in order to properly understand the practice of sliding the shuttle through the loom, we have to understand that this constitutes weaving, and in order to fully understand weaving itself, we must refer to the practice of making clothes which serves to keep us warm, or fashionable, or decent, or whatever. As for our use of '+', addition is not some kind of self-enclosed game, but must be seen as interdependent with a host of other practices and goals, which make up our form of life, such as buying groceries, counting the people in a room, managing one's money, etc. In order to grasp the concept of addition, one must also grasp the meaningfulness of these other practices and *vice versa*. Consider again the class room situation. Contrary appearances notwithstanding, we are not taught addition for its own sake, but in order to be capable of functioning in a society where these and many other practices depend on the ability to add. All of these activities and purposes are constitutive of a certain "referential totality" which makes up our form of life as a whole. Hence there is a hierarchy of meaningful and purposeful activities. What makes any activity *meaningful* is its purpose or goal, and in contrast to Kripke's picture where normativity is somehow built upon primitive inclinations, meaning is here imposed "from the top", so to speak. To be sure, the meaningfulness of a practice is not linguistic as such. Although it can be argued that

linguisticality does in fact pervade our activities, I shall not present an argument to that effect here.

(iii) The referential totality of everyday activities is not only meaningful, but also contains norms. It is not just that there are better or worse ways of going about achieving one's goals; there are right and wrong ways of doing so. Using a guillotine and grass is not the right way to go about weaving cloth, for example, nor is strumming the warps of a loom properly construed as weaving. Kripke of course is not denying this outright. We have already seen that he grants that to follow addition (correctly) is to go on one way, to follow quaddition, another. He might also agree to the point being made here that both addition and quaddition are determinate functions in virtue of being part of two different referential totalities or forms of life. But, he would argue, this does not answer the sceptical problem which concerns the issue of which functions we mean and *a fortiori* which is our form of life. What he fails to consider is the following.

(iv) Some understanding of the meaningfulness of the activity in question must be ascribed to the agent.[14] When an individual is described or understood to be currently doing something, certain purposes and goals are attributed to her, even if she is acting quite unreflectively. That is, if I am sitting at a loom weaving, to say that I am sitting at a wooden frame pushing a small piece of wood back and forth through a set of strings in most circumstances is not an adequate let alone an exhaustive description of what I am doing. Even to say that I am weaving or making cloth for a gown may not be sufficient. Perhaps I am weaving out of sheer boredom, in order improve my manual dexterity, or to take my mind off the completion of my thesis. Against all these possibilities, I may go through the motions of weaving just as automatically as I perform addition for the sake of not being cheated for instance.

(v) The reason why the background understanding and its nature are easily

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[14] To the extent that the ascription of goals and purposes entails the ascription of the ability to formulate them, it furthermore entails the ascription of linguistic capacity. (The elaboration of this last point would be a first step in the argument for the pervasiveness of linguisticality alluded to above.)

overlooked is that under normal circumstances, we are not explicitly aware of the hierarchy or referential totality. While weaving, I hardly entertain any of the possibilities mentioned above consciously. I am not thinking of them; they are not cognitively realised or represented. Indeed, the more absorbed we are in task such as weaving, the less we take into account both the tool immediately at hand (the shuttle) and the larger goal of our activity (to provide the fabric for clothing). In fact, if I become too self-consciously aware of the shuttle in my hand, this may even interfere with a smooth continuation of my work.

Although we may not be aware of the larger context, it is there nonetheless; otherwise, the activity of weaving would lose its point. If prompted, I should provide some of the attitudes, beliefs and desires that guide my behaviour unhesitatingly. Moreover, it is permissible and indeed correct to ascribe these to me whether or not I am thinking of them if they explain or in some way elucidate my behaviour and are accessible to me as participant in a certain form of life. However, I cannot make explicit the whole referential totality. This means not only that not all the beliefs and desires we might reasonably ascribe to an agent need to be cognitively realised or represented in her mind, but also that the background understanding that must be attributed to the rule-follower goes beyond her more or less immediate goals and purposes, no matter how unreflective. For these could be conceived if not as represented in the individual's mind, then at least as confined to her in some other way. Applied to Kripke's puzzle, this means that neither the rule of addition which an individual is putatively following nor the person's grasp of the totality of practices need be represented in her head. Nor can it be thus represented, as we realise upon recalling that background understanding was introduced as a constituent of a form of life, not merely as the capacity of an individual. To say that this understanding is communal, not idiolectic, means that it includes a grasp of a referential totality of practices. These in turn concern the interactions of people; the interweaving of practices takes place in the public space among the members of a community sharing a form of life.

At first glance much of this sounds very much like what Kripke himself says concerning the utility of the practice of addition which

> ...is evident and can be brought out by considering ... a man who buys something at the grocer's. The customer, when he deals with the grocer and asks for five apples, expects the grocer to count as he does, not according to some bizarre non-standard rule; and so, if his dealings with the grocer involve a computation, such as '68+57', he expects the grocer's responses to agree with his own. Indeed, he may entrust the computation to the grocer. Of course the grocer may make mistakes in addition; he may even make dishonest computations. But as long as the customer attributes to him a grasp of the concept of addition, he expects that at least the grocer will not behave bizarrely, as he would if he were to follow a quus-like rule; and one can even expect that, in many cases, he will come up with the same answer the customer would have given himself (p. 92-3).

However, we must ask ourselves whether, given the criticisms raised against Kripke in chapter 3, he is entitled to introduce the concepts of rule and utility at all. Note that he does not - and cannot - claim that the customer expects the grocer to arrive at the *correct* result, but only that he expects him to arrive at the same result as he. For, as I maintain, Kripke reduces normativity to brute inclinations. Yet the appeal to the role and utility of a practice requires that there be normativity tout court - which in turn can only be upheld if our form of life is viewed as a referential totality of meaningful practices. As we have seen, this is not an option for Kripke according to whom there is no right or wrong for the community.

We are now at last in a position to see the sense in which the current proposal is a straight rather than a sceptical solution. Let us return to the sceptic's initial query. If neither the rules we are following nor our grasp of the referential totality needs to be represented in our minds, wherein does this grasp consist? What constitutes our meaning addition rather than quaddition by '+'? The Wittgensteinian answer is that our grasp of addition consists in our ability to provide the correct response in particular cases, in going on the right way. Kripke's scenario exemplifying the "role and utility" of the concept of addition can be reformulated as an illustration of the fact that we *can* provide reasons for the way we as a matter of fact go on. We do so by articulating our background understanding, which, by definition almost, is normally not articulated. That is, we have

the capacity to make explicit aspects of the referential totality constituting our form of life of which we are ordinarily not explicitly aware. Certainly, meaning addition by '+' itself falls into this category. We do not usually need to point out to people that we mean addition by '+'. It is taken for granted in order for our interactions to take place. If asked what justifies my thinking that I mean addition by 'plus', I can point to "all the consequences I draw" from it every day, such as expecting the right change in stores, counting the days until the final deadline to submit this work, etc. Moreover, when I do run out of such justifications, the claim that "this is just the way I go on" does not mean "this is just my brute reaction, given my ethology". This would constitute the "leaching out" of norms from our picture of bedrock. Rather, the ability to provide reasons justifying our meaning addition presupposes our being part of a form of life which is not reducible to brute inclinations. Unlike the latter, my articulation of facts from the background and my meaning addition rests on an understanding I have of this practice. Furthermore, the ability to go on the right way itself also rests on a rich background understanding. Herein lies the crucial difference form Kripke's Wittgenstein. When I run into someone coming round a corner and jump back, this is a reflex, something I "just do" (even if I always "do the same thing" when I run into someone like that). Addition and rule-following in general, on the other hand, presuppose not only that certain practices are in place but also that the agent have a grasp of these practices, which are normative not just in Kripke's sense that if individuals do not abide by them, others can correct them, but in the sense that they presuppose a correct way of going on.

But is the appeal to background understanding not simply a rehashing of the commonsense response to the sceptic which was disallowed long ago? Have I not forgotten that, for all I know, whatever facts I articulate or cite, they are equally compatible with my meaning 'quus' as well as 'plus' and hence cannot furnish the sought justification? The answer to both questions is no, on the grounds that the facts I cite by appealing to background understanding and the consequences I draw on its basis are not facts *about me* or my past history such as the fact that I learned addition in school. Rather, they refer

to other practices involving interaction with others.

Finally, is Kripke still in a position where he can insist yet again that even if it is granted that quus and plus respectively are part of two separate referential totalities, the question how we determine to which we subscribe remains? Wittgenstein himself insists after all that

> ... when I am quite certain of how words are used, have no doubt about it, I can still give no *grounds* for my way of going on. If I tried I could give a thousand, but none as certain as the very thing they were supposed to be grounds for (OC 341).

This variation of the sceptical problem, however, can be rejected. For Wittgenstein also asserts that a hypothesis like the quaddition hypothesis is "idle". "Nothing would follow from it, nothing be explained by it. It would not tie in with anything in my life" (OC 117).[15] One could say, as Kripke himself might, that there are no assertibility conditions for the statement "I mean quaddition by 'plus'"; such statements have no role to play in our lives. However, even though the point can be made in terms of assertibility conditions, the assertibilist account, which views assertibility conditions basically as descriptions of our various games of concept attribution, must be viewed against the backdrop of communal background understanding which gives rise to and validates these assertibility conditions.

At the outset of this chapter I claimed that a viable alternative solution must begin even before the paradox propagating the search for a fact of the matter as to what an individual means can be formulated. The quaddition puzzle can get off the ground only if we allow that there is an issue as to which rule we mean by '+', i.e. if we allow more than one possible interpretations of the sign. If, as I have contended throughout, our rule-following is based on our being privy to a communal, non-interpretive background understanding, there is no need for the "sought" justification in terms of a fact about the individual; nor indeed does the question of justifying meaning one thing rather than another come up at all. Because we always already have a grasp of one way of going on

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[15] Wittgenstein is here actually referring to the supposition that I have been to the moon (or, for more modern purposes, to Alpha Centauri), but clearly the examples are analogous.

being right, another wrong, we are never in a situation of having to decide as to which is correct or justified. What determines that I am following addition and not quaddition and that meaning one rather than the other can be attributed to me is that I am part of a form of life in which addition is an embedded practice. I already have a grasp of a host of other facts and practices which constitute our form of life and some of which I can produce as reasons that justify my meaning plus and not quus by '+' when called upon to do so. There is no need to appeal to anything in my mind or about my behaviour in virtue of which my belief to be following addition could be justified.

Kripke writes that the sceptical paradox "holds no terror" in our daily lives (p. 87). Indeed, the paradox can only be raised "when language goes on holiday" (38). That is, the paradox at best shows that a rule *by itself*, i.e. outside the context of other rules and practices interrelated with it, does not determine what counts as in accord with it. Kripke neglects to stress sufficiently that the indeterminacy in question is only an indeterminacy *in principle*, not in practice. To the extent that the alternative solution I have here proposed likewise endeavours to show *why* the paradox poses no threat, its strategy is similar to Kripke's. Within the parameters that Kripke has set, there is no straight solution to the paradox in the form. Yet unlike Kripke, I have not opted for a sceptical solution upholding the sceptic's demand, but chosen to modify the parameters within which to search for a straight solution. As a result the sceptic's query as to what justifies my following a rule or understanding an ostensive definition one way rather than another is rejected in favour of asking what determines my doing so *in practice*. And the answer to that question is, the context and the background understanding which I bring to a given situation and which I share with other members of my community in virtue of sharing a form of life.

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