KRIPKE'S ACCOUNT OF THE ARGUMENT AGAINST PRIVATE LANGUAGE*

SAUL Kripke's *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*† suggests interpreting Wittgenstein's argument against private language as a direct corollary of the considerations about rule following which immediately precede those passages in the *Investigations* (§243 and following) on which more traditional attempts to understand Wittgenstein's thought on privacy have tended to concentrate. For a long time I thought Kripke's interpretation of these matters more or less coincident with that at which I had arrived independently and which I had presented in my *Wittgenstein on the Foundations of Mathematics* and elsewhere.[1] A careful reading of Kripke's book has convinced me both that this is not the case and that the dominant impression given in my book of the relation between the private-language argument (PLA) and the rule-following considerations (RFC) is misleading.

The leading suggestion about the PLA in that book was that it is to be viewed as *part* of the considerations about rule following: an argument, essentially, that the sort of objectivity of meaning necessary if we are to think of the truth values of unconsidered, uninvestigated statements as determinate independently of any investigation we may carry out, can find no refuge in the situation of a single speaker and his idiolect. The RFC were then depicted as taking the argument outwards, as it were—arguing, first, that, within the sphere of communal practice, concepts and distinctions can be given currency, on the basis of which a "thinner" notion of correctness and incorrectness in linguistic usage can be rehabilitated than that sanctioned by objective meaning; but, second, that, as far as the propriety of objective meaning is concerned, the community at large ultimately fares no better than the would-be private linguist. With none of this, at least as a potentially fruitful framework for the investigation of Wittgenstein's later philosophies of mind and mathematics, do I now disagree. But it does seem to me now that the treatment in my book could be usefully supplemented in at least two respects.

*This paper amplifies part of the discussion of my "Kripke's Wittgenstein," presented at the 7th International Wittgenstein Symposium in Kirchberg-am-Wechsel, Austria, in 1982, but omitted from the associated published volume.

†Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981. All page references are to this text unless otherwise stated.

[1] London: Duckworth, 1980. See also C. Leich and O. Holtzman, eds., *Wittgenstein: To Follow a Rule* (London: Routledge & Keagan Paul, 1981), pp. 99–106; and "Strict Finitism," *Synthese*, LI, 2 (May 1982): 203–282, pp. 248–252.

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First, I think the involvement of "antirealist" premises in the arguments against objective meaning was there overemphasized; it seems to me that a more sensitive, sparing, and concept-specific use of such premises may be possible without compromise of the power of the argument. Second, more stress is wanted that Wittgenstein has a *differential* claim about private language: that the would-be private linguist and the community are not, in the end, in the same predicament. I shall not, in this paper, attempt to enlarge upon either of these claims.[2] The notable point is that an analogue of each is a prominent feature of Kripke's interpretation: the *skeptical argument* needs no anti-realist (verificationist) assistance; and the bearing of the *skeptical solution* on private language admits of no community-wide generalization.

Although I do not think that Kripke has Wittgenstein right, my subject, except in the last section of the paper, is not the historical Wittgenstein but Kripke's Wittgenstein. I shall argue that, even if the main argument—the skeptical argument—which Kripke finds in Wittgenstein, is sustained, there is strong prima facie reason to doubt whether the accommodation with it—skeptical solution—which Kripke represents Wittgenstein as commending can really be lived with; whether, indeed, that accommodation is so much as coherent. And I shall canvass ways, unconsidered (or only very cursorily considered) by Kripke, for resisting the skeptical argument. The upshot will be that the RFC, as interpreted by Kripke, are flawed by a lacuna, and that, even if the lacuna were filled, the PLA could nevertheless not emerge in the manner that Kripke describes.

Because the gist of my remarks about Kripke's book is going to be largely critical, it is perhaps worth emphasizing my admiration of it. Whatever its relation to Wittgenstein's actual thought, and whether or not ultimately cogent, Kripke's dialectic is tremendously exciting. It will surely provide a great spur to improving our understanding of Wittgenstein's philosophy.

I. THE SKEPTICAL ARGUMENT

Fundamental to Hume's moral philosophy, as to his views about causation, is a distinction between statements that are apt to express real matters of fact and certain sentences that, although possessed of standard features of the syntax of genuine statements—in

[2] They are enlarged on in, respectively, "Rule-following and Constructivism," in C. Travis and B. Gelder, eds., *Inference and Understanding*, projected, and "Does Wittgenstein Have a Cogent Argument against Private Language?" in J. McDowell and P. Pettit, eds. *Context, Content and Thought*, forthcoming (New York: Oxford, 1985).

particular, the capacity to serve as arguments for various types of statement-forming operator—are actually used not to state facts but rather to *project* various aspects of speakers' attitudes and affective responses. Moral discourse, and talk of causation, belong, for Hume, in the latter category. Moral judgments, so viewed, do not express our cognition of moral facts by which various moral sentiments in us are generated; rather they serve to project those moral sentiments upon the world. Likewise, those statements which the non-Humean takes to aver the existence of causal relations, from which certain observed regularities flow, serve for Hume to project an attitude that we take up toward those observed regularities.

It is familiar that this sort of distinction is pivotal to a whole class of important philosophical disputes. Realism not merely about ethics and causation, but also about aesthetics, theoretical science, pure mathematics, logical necessity, and Lockean secondary qualities may each be opposed by appropriate versions of Humean noncognitive "projectivism."

In this light, Kripke's Wittgenstein may be seen as first, by the skeptical argument, confounding the ordinary idea that our talk of meaning and understanding and cognate concepts has a genuinely factual subject matter, and then, via the skeptical solution, recommending an alternative projective view of its content. It is worth emphasis that the skeptical solution is independent of the skeptical argument: strictly, the option is open of simply accepting the latter as demonstrating the vacuity of all our talk of meaning, etc., with no prospect of its rehabilitation. (Similarly, a sympathizer might regard Hume as having demonstrated that we should simply drop all talk of causation.) Accordingly, it might seem as though one way of resisting the PLA, as Kripke interprets it, would simply be to take the skeptical medicine straight, eschewing the compensating sweetmeat of the skeptical solution afterwards. I shall return to that thought.

There are a variety of ways in which it might be argued that a region of discourse apparently apt for the stating of facts does not really perform that role. One way, the Humean strategy, would be to argue that from within the framework of a certain preferred epistemology, no reputable conception can be attained of the putative species of fact in question. Another general strategy would be to let the argument flow from a topic-neutral account of the ways in which the distinction between fact-stating and non-fact-stating declarative sentences comes out in their respective modes of employment in the language. But the strategy of argument which Kripke finds in Wittgenstein is different from both of these. Roughly, the

conclusion that there are no facts of a disputed species is to follow from an argument to the effect that, even if we imagine our abilities idealized to the point where, if there were such facts to be known, we should certainly be in possession of them, we *still* would not be in a position to justify any particular claim about their character. So we first, as it were, plot the area in which the facts in question would have to be found if they existed and then imagine a suitable idealization, with respect to that area, of our knowledge-acquiring powers; if it then transpires that any particular claim about those facts still proves resistant to all justification, there is no alternative to concluding that the "facts" never existed in the first place.

The initial target class of putative facts comprises those which you might try to express by claims of the form "By *E*, I formerly meant so-and-so." The relevant idealization will involve your total recall of all facts about your previous behavior and previous mental history, it being assumed that facts about your former meanings must be located in one of those two areas if they are located anywhere. The argument will then be that, even in terms of the idealization, no such claim is justifiable. It follows that your previous life in its entirety is empty of such facts, and hence that there are none (cf. 21 and 39).

I have sometimes encountered in discussion the complaint that, whatever independent force Kripke's development of the argument may have, its use of skepticism betrays its claim to represent Wittgenstein's actual thought. In one way, this misconstrues the skeptical argument; in another way, however, it may have a point. The misunderstanding consists in a failure to see that Kripke's skeptic is a mere device, annexed to the demonstration of a projectivist thesis which might well be supported in other ways. (It is notable that the historical Wittgenstein, though undoubtedly hostile to classical forms of skepticism, unmistakably displays projectivist leanings in certain of his remarks, e.g., on first-person ascriptions of sensation and when he compares mathematical statements to rules.) Classical forms of skepticism purport to discover inadequacies in our *actual* cognitive powers: the skeptic about induction, or other minds, or memory, holds that the best we can do, in attempting to arrive at justified opinions concerning statements in the relevant classes, always falls short of anything that ought really to be counted as justification. The skeptic whom Kripke finds in Wittgenstein, in contrast, is concerned to teach us something about the range of items that *exist to be known*. That said, there will still be a point to the complaint if it turns out that, despite these differences, the *techniques*

utilized by Kripke's skeptic are importantly similar to those which feature in traditional skeptical arguments. Wittgenstein undoubtedly thought those arguments mistaken; it is hardly likely that he would have allowed himself to succumb to an argument which, even if tending toward a conclusion congenial to him, needed to rely upon epistemological principles that, if granted, would enormously strengthen the traditional skeptic's case. We shall consider the matter in due course.

Suppose it granted that there are indeed no facts that we can express by statements of the form, "By *E*, I formerly meant so-and-so." How exactly do destructive consequences follow about the notions of meaning and understanding in general? Kripke himself is fairly brief on the point (13), but it is not difficult to see. Remember that the argument will have involved an extensive idealization of your knowledge of your previous behavior and mental history: you will have been granted perfect recall of all such facts. If it turned out that you still could not justify any preferred claim of the form "By *E*, I formerly meant so-and-so," then how can you be better placed to justify a claim of the form "By *E*, I presently mean so-and-so"? For anything true of your mental life and behavior up to and including the present will be known to you tomorrow, in accordance with the idealization. And the argument will have shown that tomorrow you won't be able to justify any claim of the form "By *E*, I yesterday meant so-and-so." Hence you cannot be in a position to justify the present-tense counterpart of that claim today. The idealization also entails that nobody else is better placed than you to justify any such claim. It follows that nobody can justify any claim about what they, or anybody else, formerly meant or means. Hence, in the presence of the idealization, there can be no facts about what anybody means by any expression. And it is impossible to see how, consistently with that admission, there might yet be facts about what expressions, as it were impersonally, mean. The strategy of the skeptical argument thus appears sound and ingenious. Everything depends upon the details of its execution.

Simplifying the details somewhat, the execution runs essentially like this. Suppose you claim, on December 21 1984, that by 'green' you meant, on December 20 1984, *green*. The skeptic challenges you to justify your claim. You are idealized to have perfect recall of all your previous linguistic and nonlinguistic behavior, together with your entire mental life—the whole pageant of your thoughts, sensations, imaginings, dreams, moods, etc. (At this point in the argument there is, of course, no doubt entertained as yet about the supposition that you *presently* know what you mean by 'green'—

the skeptic gets you to stand on the rug before he pulls it away; cf. 11/2.) Now no doubt you can cite a lot of behavior that is broadly consistent with your preferred account of your former understanding of 'green'. The skeptic will point out, however, that there are no end of alternative interpretations of your former meaning, all of which rationalize your behavior equally well. Perhaps, for example, by 'green' you formerly mean $grue_{1984}$; where an object is $grue_t$ at time k just in case k is earlier than the inception of January 1 in year t and the object is green, *or* k is some later time and the object is blue. Seemingly there are indefinitely many grue-interpretations that can be used to make sense of your previous applications of 'green', all of which are incompatible both with the supposition that by 'green' you formerly meant green and with each other.

It might be objected that this is to consider only one kind of use of 'green', viz., simple ascriptions and withholdings, and that account will need to be taken of all sorts of other more sophisticated uses, including embeddings in descriptions of your own and others' propositional attitudes, which you previously will likely have made. But, of course, the point of the example is that 'green' will be assigned the same extension, up to and including the time of your dialogue with the skeptic, under indefinitely many grue-interpretations; so the skeptic should have no difficulty in rationalizing your previous uses both in extensional contexts and in all attributions of propositional attitudes whose possession, by yourself and others, can be explained in terms of the extension of the property of being green. And even if grue-interpretations don't work out in general, the decisive consideration is surely that your previous behavior with 'green' is *finite*; hence, it must be possible, it appears, with sufficient ingenuity, to come up with some interpretation of your previous understanding of 'green' which will be as unwelcome to you as the grue-interpretations. Finite behavior cannot constrain its interpretation to within uniqueness.

The arena of battle now shifts to the mental. Perhaps considerations uniquely determining your previous understanding of 'green' can be recovered from your previous thoughts, imaginings, etc. It is evident, however, that, if the search is to succeed, the relevant mental items must have a certain *generality*. It is no good remembering imagining certain green things, or green after-images that you may have experienced, or thoughts about what you would have said if asked to describe the color of that liqueur we had on such-and-such an occasion. For the constraints imposed by introducing such considerations cannot be stronger than if the images had been public objects or if the imaginary and hypothetical situations had actually

taken place; and the effect of those transformations would merely be finitely to enlarge an inadequately finite pool of actual data. You have to come up with some mental episode that somehow has sufficient content to exclude *all* the unwanted interpretations of your former understanding of 'green', including all the grue-interpretations, at one go.

The only candidate, it appears, is some sort of general *thought*: you need to have entertained a thought that has something to say about each of the situations in which the difference between the true interpretation of your former understanding of 'green' and each of the successive grue-impostors successively comes to light. On the face of it, though, it is not far-fetched to suppose that you might very well have entertained such a thought. What if you remember having thought, say, "By 'green' I certainly don't mean any concept which, at some particular time, will continue to apply to an object only if that object changes color at that time." Does not that at least force the skeptic to work a bit harder at the concoction of unwelcome interpretations?

It wouldn't be all that satisfactory if this were the best you could do. After all, it is pretty much fortuitous whether any such thought ever occurred to you; and your knowledge about your former understanding of 'green' will not seem to you contingent on such an occurrence. What you will want to be able to say is that you know what you formerly meant by 'green' *whether or not* you happen to have had a convenient thought that can be used to scotch a particular line of unwelcome interpretation. But the skeptic, in any case, has a stronger, indeed a seemingly decisive reply. His challenge, after all, was general. No special interest attaches to the justifiability of claims about your former understanding of color predicates: the question was, can *any* claim of the form "By *E*, I formerly meant so-and-so" be justified? Clearly the challenge is not met if, in the attempt to justify one such claim, you presuppose your right to be sure of another. But just such a presupposition is made by the attempted play with the general thought above. If, for example, by 'color' you had previously meant *schmolor* (20), where the concept of schmolor stands to all grue-type concepts exactly as color stands to blue, green, etc., then your having entertained that general thought is quite consistent with the skeptic's being correct in interpreting you as having meant grue_{1984} by 'green'.

The point is perfectly general. Thoughts you may have had about how, quite generally, you should be prepared to use an expression will suffice to meet the skeptic's challenge only if you presuppose their *proper interpretation*. But that is just to presuppose

that the skeptic's challenge can be met with respect to the expressions that figure in those thoughts. Yet no category of mental item can be appropriate to the challenge except a general thought; only such a thought can have enough to say, can cover the indefinitely many potential situations in which you should wish to regard some determinate use of 'green' as mandated by the understanding that you believe you have long possessed of that expression.

It, therefore, appears that the only ploy that has any chance of accrediting your understanding of 'green' with an appropriately general normative role (11, 23, 24) totally fails to meet the skeptic's challenge. And now "it seems the whole idea of meaning vanishes into thin air" (22).

II. THE SKEPTICAL SOLUTION

Suppose that the skeptical argument is sound. Could we simply accept its conclusion and abandon all talk of meaning and understanding as founded upon error? Or must we seek some sort of rehabilitation of the concept of meaning, a skeptical solution? Kripke himself writes:

> . . . I choose to be so bold as to say: Wittgenstein holds, with the skeptic, that there is no fact as to whether I mean [green or grue_t]. But if this is to be conceded to the skeptic, 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? (70/1)

There is, however, a certain awkwardness here. Suppose someone runs a similar skeptical argument about moral obligation, concluding that statements about what people morally ought, or ought not, to do, lack a factual subject matter. It would be, to say the least, an infelicitous expression of this result to say, "So undertaking, and refraining from, any particular projected course of action are always both morally permissible." For the conclusion of the argument would apply equally to judgments of moral permissibility: to claim that a course of action is morally permissible is just to say that it is not the case that it ought to be refrained from. It is natural to wonder, correspondingly, whether the conclusion of Kripke's skeptic is indeed "incredible and self-defeating" only if the notion of meaninglessness which Kripke uses in its formulation presupposes the notion of meaning as moral permissibility presupposes the notion of obligation. If that is so, the right conclusion is surely that such is not the way to formulate the conclusion of the skeptical argument. Once it is better formulated, such un-

happy claims as that all language is meaningless, that nobody ever succeeds in understanding anybody else, etc., will presumably not be entailed.

If somebody wishes to reject the suitability of a certain class of concepts to figure in statements apt to be genuinely true or false, this rejection cannot coherently take the form, it appears, of *any* kind of denial of statements in which those concepts figure. What then *is* the proper way of formulating the conclusions of Kripke's skeptic? One influential view of the concepts of meaning and understanding, associated chiefly with the writings of W. V. Quine, is that their paramount function for us is as theoretical terms in a deeply entrenched but philosophically suspect scheme of explanation of human linguistic behavior and of nonlinguistic but language-related patterns of social activity. If we think of this scheme as issuing in a large class of only semi-articulated theories about particular individuals and groups of individuals, then one way of expressing the conclusion of the skeptical argument is that *scientific realism* about these theories is not an option; there are no facts, describable only by recourse to the concepts of meaning and understanding, which such theories might succeed in codifying. An immediate consequence of this perspective is that two quite different lines of response to the skeptical argument are apparently open. One is a kind of *instrumentalism*: a view which tries to retain the propriety of theorizing of the sort in question while granting its nonfactual status. The skeptical solution attempts just this. The other response is to regard theorizing of this sort as *discredited,* and to seek better approaches involving quite alternative systems of concepts. That, in general, is Quine's own response to the difficulties that he finds in meaning and other intentional notions. If it admits satisfactory development, then the skeptical solution—and with it Kripke's reading of the PLA—would seem to be *de trop.*

This picture of the role of the concepts of meaning and understanding in our ordinary thinking is, however, an oversimplification. It ignores the larger class of self-directed statements concerning meaning and understanding which we make—the class that Wittgenstein himself gives special attention to—and, still more importantly, it makes nothing of various platitudes that articulate our conception of the connections between meaning and truth. One such platitude is that the truth value of a statement depends only upon its meaning and the state of the world in relevant respects. Equivalently:

> An utterance of *S* expresses a truth in a particular context if and only if what, in that context, *S* says is so, is so.

The obvious corollary is that, if we take the view that the skeptical argument discredits *all* talk of meaning, understanding, and cognate concepts—like the concept of what a sentence is used to say—it is not clear how much purchase we can retain on our ordinary notion of a statement's being true. A proponent of the Quinean view has the choice either to abandon the notion of truth altogether or to reconstruct it in a fashion that liberates it from conceptual ties with the discredited notion of meaning. The former course, however, is hardly an option unless we are prepared to abandon the idea that it is *ever* the case that language has a fact-stating function. (And if that were our view, why see the conclusion of the skeptical argument as calling into question the propriety of talk involving the concepts of meaning and understanding?) The reconstructive project, on the other hand, looks to be utterly daunting. (Indeed it is doubtful whether, in the present context, it is coherent to suppose that there can be such a project; for whatever reconstruction of truth, free of all play with meaning and cognate notions, were proposed, it is not clear why an analogue of the skeptical argument would not be available to rob any particular assignment of truth conditions to a sentence of all possible behavioral or psychological corroboration.)

So the strategy incorporated in the skeptical solution may seem more attractive. It is in any case more comfortable to think of any errors involved in our talk of meaning, or our moral language, as *philosophical*: as belonging to our picture of what is going on in those areas of linguistic practice, rather than as undermining the practices themselves. Thus, Kripke suggests (73 ff) that statements involving the notion of meaning have no *truth conditions*, properly so described, but only conditions of justified or warranted use:

> All that is needed to legitimize assertions that someone means something is that there be roughly specified circumstances under which they are legitimately assertable, and that the game of asserting them under such conditions has a role in our lives (77/8).

Kripke's interpretation of the PLA now follows elegantly from this reorientation. Without attempting to do justice to the detail of his exposition (81 ff, summarized 107/8), we find that the most natural account of the justification conditions of statement forms like:

(i) Jones means addition by '+'.

and

(ii) If Jones means addition by '+', then he will answer '125' when asked, "What is 47 + 78?"

involves essential reference to a community of practitioners with the symbols they mention. Very roughly, (i) will be considered justified if Jones performs satisfactorily often enough with '+' and marks his acceptance into the community of '+' users—those whose uses of '+' can generally be depended upon. And (ii) expresses a test for membership in that community, ratified by the responses of those already accredited with membership. Accordingly, such statement forms simply have no legitimate application to symbols whose use is essentially "private" and which cannot, in the nature of the case, competently be taken up by a community. So the concepts of meaning and understanding have no proper place in the description of an apparent linguistic practice of an individual, if that practice is one in which others could not competently share.

The elegance of Kripke's interpretation does not, however, long conceal its difficulties. One immediate difficulty is presented by the meaning-truth platitude. If the truth value of *S* is determined by its meaning and the state of the world in relevant respects, then nonfactuality in one of the determinants can be expected to induce nonfactuality in the outcome. (A rough parallel: If among the determinants of whether it is worth while going to see a certain exhibition is how well presented the leading exhibits are, then, if questions of good presentation are not considered to be entirely factual, neither is the matter of whether it is worth while going to see the exhibition.) A projectivist view of meaning is thus, it appears, going to enjoin a projectivist view of what is for a statement to be true. Whence, unless it is, mysteriously, possible for a projective statement to sustain a biconditional with a genuinely factual statement, the disquotational schema '$\ulcorner P \urcorner$' is true if and only if *P*' will churn out the result that *all* statements are projective.

Kripke's own remarks are confusing in this regard. He quotes with approval (73) Michael Dummett's suggestion that the central contrast between the picture of language and meaning proposed in the *Tractatus* and that of the *Investigations* resides in a shift from a conception of statement-meaning as truth-conditional to the view that the meaning of each statement is fixed by its association with conditions of justified assertion. But Dummett, at least as I read him, never intended that reorientation to involve a total rejection of the category of fact-stating discourse. It could not be so intended with any plausibility, since, as we have noted, the historical Wittgenstein thought that we are apt to be misled by the form of our discourse in certain selected areas into thinking that its role has to be that of stating facts. He could hardly have considered that we

were likely to be so *misled* unless he thought that form of discourse to be very often associated with the activity of fact-stating. In any case, whatever intention Dummett, or Wittgenstein, may have had, it is doubtful that it is coherent to suppose that projectivist views could be appropriate quite globally. For, however exactly the distinction be drawn between fact-stating and non-fact-stating discourse, the projectivist will presumably want it to come by way of a *discovery* that certain statements fail to quality for the former class; a statement of the conclusion of the skeptical argument, for instance, is not *itself* to be projective. But can Kripke's exposition make space for this admission? According to Kripke, what is distinctive of fact-stating is the possession by one's statements of "real truth conditions" (whatever that may mean). And how can the judgment, "*S* has (real) truth conditions," be genuinely factual if—in accordance with the platitude and the considerations of a moment ago—"*S* is true" is not?

Another way of seeing that the situation cannot really be satisfactory is to inquire what status, once the skeptical argument is accepted, is supposed to be possessed by the sort of account adumbrated by Kripke of the assertion conditions of statements about meaning and understanding. Could it yesterday have been *true* of a single individual that he associated with the sentence "Jones means addition by '+'" the sort of assertion conditions Kripke sketches? Well, if so, that truth did not consist in any aspect of his finite use of that sentence or of its constituents; and, just as before, it would seem that his previous thoughts about that sentence and its use will suffice to constrain to within uniqueness the proper interpretation of the assertion conditions he associated with it only if he is granted correct recall of the content of those thoughts—exactly what the skeptical argument does not grant. But would not any truths concerning the assertion conditions previously associated by somebody with a particular sentence have to be constituted by aspects of his erstwhile behavior and mental life? So the case appears no weaker than in the skeptical argument proper for the conclusion that there *are* no such truths; whence, following the same routine, it speedily follows that there are no truths about the assertion conditions that any of us presently associates with a particular sentence, nor, *a fortiori,* any truths about a communal association. It follows that the premises, requisite for Kripke's version of the PLA, about the community-oriented character of the assertion conditions of statements concerning meaning and understanding are not genuinely factual, and the same must presumably be said of the conclusion, that the concepts of meaning and understanding have no proper application to a private linguist.

The skeptical solution seems to me, therefore, to be a failure. More: to sustain the skeptical argument is to uncage a tiger whose depredations there is then no hope of containing.

III. RESISTING THE SKEPTICAL ARGUMENT

Kripke himself considers two possible sources of error in the argument. The first is the assumption that facts about my former understanding of *E* must be constituted by aspects of my former behavior and mental life. Is not a more plausible candidate, a certain former *disposition,* the disposition to use *E* in certain sorts of way? Against this suggestion Kripke brings (26–37) two prima facie very telling sets of considerations to bear. First, the relevant sorts of disposition are, with respect to any particular expression, presumably finite, since all my capacities are finite; whereas, intuitively, we want the meaning of *E* to contribute toward the determination of its correct use in literally no end of potential cases. Second, meanings are, whereas dispositions are not, *normative*: I may, in certain circumstances, be disposed to use an expression in a way which is out of accord with my understanding of it and which, therefore, constitutes wrongful use of that expression; whereas I can scarcely be said to have a disposition to use an expression in a way out of accord with the way in which I am disposed to use it. Now there is, no doubt, scope for discussion about how decisive these two rejoinders are.[3] In particular, it need not be contradictory to suppose that someone may be disposed to act in a way in which he is not disposed to act—provided his dispositions are appropriately *stratified.* So much, at any rate, is certainly part of our ordinary concept of a disposition: almost all the dispositional properties about which we ordinarily speak are such that their display is conditional on the absence of certain interfering factors, and there is no contradiction in the idea that such interference might be widespread and even usual. The matter is obviously one of some subtlety. Here I can do little more than record my own view that Kripke is ultimately right, at least as far as our intuitive conceptions of meaning and understanding are concerned. Understanding an expression is, intuitively, more like an ability than a disposition.[4] Roughly, it is the (fallible) ability to suit one's employment of the expression to certain constraints. Even at the most fundamental level, then, and when nothing interferes with the exercise of a disposition, there ought to be a distinction between what somebody's understanding

[3] See, e.g., Simon Blackburn, "The Individual Strikes Back", *Synthese,* LVIII, 3 (March 1984): 281–301, and Graeme Forbes, "Skepticism and Semantic Knowledge", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society,* LXXXIV (1983/4): 221–237.

[4] Cf. G. P. Baker and P. M. S. Hacker, *Wittgenstein: Meaning and Understanding,* vol. I of *Essays on the Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), ch. XVI.

of *E* requires of him and the use of that expression which he actually makes; it is just that, if nothing interferes with the exercise of the disposition, the use he makes *will be* the use required of him. You could put the point by saying that, intuitively, understanding generates *rule-governed* behavior; to suppose that it is at some fundamental level simply a matter of a disposition is to ignore the distinction between suiting one's behavior to a rule and merely behaving in such a way that, when the rule is construed as a descriptive hypothesis, it fits what one does.

A second response to the skeptical argument which Kripke discusses (41-50) is the idea that meaning green by 'green' "denotes an irreducible experience, with its own special *quale,* known directly to each of us by introspection." If there were such an experience "as unique and irreducible as that of seeing yellow or feeling a headache," then—in the presence of the relevant idealizations—it could simply be recalled in response to the skeptic's challenge and that would be that. Kripke's response to this proposal, drawing extensively on themes explicit in the *Investigations,* is surely decisive. Quite apart from the introspective implausibility of the suggestion, it is impossible to see how such an experience could have the *content* that understanding is conceived as having, could have, as it were, something to say about the correct use of *E* in indefinitely many situations. There might, indeed, be a distinctive experience *associated* with meaning so-and-so by *E*; but then, in order for recall of the experience to meet the skeptic's challenge, it would be necessary additionally to recall the association—and that would presuppose recall of one's former understanding of *E,* the possibility of which is exactly what is at issue.

There are, however, a number of other ways in which the skeptic's routine, seductive though Kripke's presentation makes it seem, is open to serious question. One concerns the play the skeptic makes with the *finitude* of previous linguistic behavior. There is no question, of course, but that the relevant behavior is finite and that it is thereby debarred from supplying a *conclusive* ground for affirming that your former understanding of *E* was, indeed, so-and-so. But to suppose that it follows that there is no rational basis for preference among indefinitely many competing hypotheses, all of which are consistent with your previous linguistic behavior, is tantamount to the supposition that Goodman's "new riddle of induction" admits of no solution. This point does not, of course, depend on the fact that we actually used a Goodman-type example in the development of the skeptical argument. Rather, Goodman's riddle is exactly the challenge to explain in what, if any, sense it is ra-

tional to prefer, on the basis of finite evidence, the sorts of general hypotheses which we invariably do prefer to any of the other indefinitely many alternatives whose formulation he illustrates. Of course, this assimilation is not in itself a satisfactory rejoinder to Kripke's skeptic. But it does at least show him up for a fairly familiar animal. And it teaches us that we ought not to regard the skeptical argument as, so to speak, establishing a theorem unless we think it right to despair of a solution to Goodman's riddle.[5]

What *is* unsatisfactory about the suggestion is that it gets the intuitive epistemology of understanding wrong. Recognition that a certain use of an expression fits one's former (and current) understanding of it would not, it seems, except in the most extraordinary circumstances, have to proceed by inference to the best semantic explanation of one's previous uses of that expression. The kind of fact—if, against the skeptical argument, there can indeed be such a fact—which having formerly had a particular understanding of an expression is, is misrepresented by this response.

There is, however, a further response, focusing on the second stage of the skeptical argument, at the point where it is argued that, no matter how rich a battery of explicit thoughts you may

[5] Afficionados of Kripke's text might feel that he, in effect, answers this point (38). "Let no one—under the influence of too much philosophy of science—suggest that the hypothesis that I meant plus is to be preferred as the *simplest* hypothesis. I will not here argue that simplicity is relative or that it is hard to define, or that a Martian might find the quus function simpler than the plus function. Such replies may have considerable merit, but the real trouble with the appeal to simplicity is more basic. Such an appeal must be based on a misunderstanding of the skeptical problem, or of the role of simplicity considerations, or both. Recall of the skeptical problem was not merely epistemic. The skeptic argues that there is no *fact* [my italics] as to what I meant, whether plus or quus. Now simplicity considerations can help us decide between competing hypotheses, but they obviously can never tell us what the competing hyopotheses are. If we do not understand what two hypotheses *state*, what does it mean to say that one is 'more probable' because it is 'simpler'? If the two competing hypotheses are not genuine hypotheses, not assertions of genuine matters of fact, no 'simplicity' considerations will make them so."

I do not wish to suggest that canons of simplicity provide an appropriate response to Goodman's riddle. However, Kripke's point is general. Whatever criterion of preferability among competing hypotheses we come up with, its application can be appropriate only if we do genuinely have competing *hypotheses*, only if there is some "fact of the matter" about which we are trying to arrive at a rational view. Therefore—or so Kripke's thought presumably runs—we beg the question against the skeptic in appealing to any such criteria at this stage. But this surely gets everything back to front. It is only *after* the skeptical argument has come to its conclusion that the skeptic is entitled to the supposition that there is indeed no such fact of the matter. In the course of the argument, *he* cannot assume as much without begging the question. At the stage at which we might appeal to the sort of refined methodology which could be used to answer Goodman's riddle, there simply is not yet any basis for thinking that talk of meaning and understanding is not factual. For what is, I think, a better response to the point, see the sequel in the text.

formerly have entertained concerning your understanding of *E*, these thoughts will not turn the trick. Kripke's skeptic discounted the attempt to bring your previous general thoughts against unwelcome interpretations of your previous use of *E*, on the grounds that you thereby presuppose knowledge of the proper interpretation of those thoughts—which is, in detail, knowledge of the very putative species currently under suspicion. This can seem reasonable. On inspection, however, it cannot *always* be possible to justify a presumed genre of knowledge "from without" in the way the skeptic is here demanding. At any rate, it is obvious enough that, if we were to allow the propriety quite generally of this skeptical move, the results would be calamitous. Imagine, for example, a skeptic who questions a claim about my former perceptions, 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, like damp ground, etc. and meteorological office and newspaper records. 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 perceived. 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. "There's glory for you!"

The trouble, evidently, is the assumption that knowledge of a former perception has to be *inferential,* that the ultimate grounds for such knowledge must reside in knowledge of a different sort. That is true only if knowledge of what I am presently perceiving is inferential; otherwise, the skeptic may satisfactorily be answered simply by recalling what one formerly perceived. So, too, Kripke's skeptic persuades his victim to search for recalled facts from which the character of his former understanding of *E* may be *derived.* And that is fair play only if knowledge of a *present* meaning has to be inferential; otherwise the skeptic is satisfactorily answered simply by recalling what one formerly meant.

The claim, then, is that the methodology of the skeptical argument is appropriate, if ever, only to cases where it is right to view the putative species of knowledge in question as essentially inferential. And no ground for that supposition in the present case has so far been produced. But if it is to be possible simply to recall the character of former meanings, can the requisite presupposition, that knowledge of present meanings may be noninferential, really be made good? Kripke, in effect, confronts this suggestion when he considers the possibility (50/1) that meaning so-and-so by *E* might simply be an irreducible, *sui generis* state, a state "not to be assimilated to sensations or headaches or any 'qualitative' states, nor to be assimilated to dispositions, but a state of a unique kind of its own." His reply, only very briefly developed (52/3), is that it is utterly mysterious how such a state could have the requisite properties, in particular how, although a finite state realized in a finite mind, it could nevertheless have the potential infinity of content that the normativity of meaning requires. How can there be a state which each of us knows about, in his own case at least, noninferentially and yet which is infinitely fecund, possessing specific directive content for no end of distinct situations?

This may be a good question. But Kripke's discussion contrives to leave the impression that it is rhetorical, that we have not the slightest idea what such a state might be. Whereas a little reflection shows that both these features—noninferentiality and indefinite "fecundity"—are simply characteristic of our standard intuitive notion of *intention*. Normally, we are credited with a special authority for the character of our own intentions; asked about them, it is considered that we ought to know the answer, and, saving lying and slips of the tongue, etc., that our answers should be given a special weight. Admittedly, this authority does not have to be taken to suggest noninferential knowledge; it might be, for example, that it derived from authority for the premises of an inference—say, certain occurrent thoughts. But to think of self-knowledge of intention, in any case where the subject would be credited with authority, as invariably based on inference from associated occurrent thoughts is to caricature the ordinary notion. For one thing, each of us regularly carries out intentional acts without necessarily thinking about what we are doing at all. Usually these are routine activities in which we are expert. It is perfectly proper to say of such activities that they are knowingly and intentionally performed and, indeed, that they are preceded by the appropriate intention. (If you were asked, in advance, whether you had the appropriate intention, you would unhesitatingly confirm that you did.) Notice also that we can in general make no ready sense of the question,

"How do you know?" directed at an avowal of intention; if there were an inference in the offing, the question ought to admit of a straightforward answer. But the decisive consideration is this. Even when an intention is accompanied by certain occurrent thoughts relating to its content or the circumstances of the (envisaged) course of action, one's knowledge of the character of the intention is not to be thought of as achieved via reflection on the content of those thoughts. If it were, by what principle could I assure myself that *those* were the thoughts on which I should be concentrating, rather than some other recent (or, if I am clever enough, simultaneous) train? To come to know that you have a certain intention is not to have it dawn on you that you have an intention of *some* sort and then to recover an account of what the intention is by reflecting upon recent or accompanying thoughts. It is the other way round: you recognize thoughts as specifying the content of an intention that you have *because* you know what the intention is an intention to do.

What of the mysterious fecundity? Well, suppose I intend, for example, to prosecute at the earliest possible date anyone who trespasses on my land. Then there can indeed be no end of distinct responses, in distinct situations, which I must make if I remember this intention, continue to wish to fulfill it, and correctly apprehend the prevailing circumstances. But *if* we are at ease with the idea that my intention has a general content, noninferentially known to me, then there is no more a puzzle about the "infinity" of this content than there is a puzzle about the capacity of any universally quantified conditional, $(x)(Fx \rightarrow Gx)$, to yield indefinitely many consequences of the form, $Ga,Gb, \ldots,$ when conjoined with corresponding premises of the form, $Fa,Fb, \ldots$.

I want to stress that this is merely to describe what seem to be features of our intuitive notion of intention. The notion is not unproblematic. It could be that it is radically incoherent. The fact remains that it is available to confront Kripke's skeptic, and that, so far as I can see, the skeptical argument is powerless against it. The ordinary notion of intention has it that it is a characteristic of mind—alongside thought, mood, desire, and sensation—that a subject has, in general, authoritative and noninferential access to the content of his own intentions, and that this content may be open-ended and general, may relate to all situations of a certain kind. In order, then, to rebut the skeptical argument, it would have sufficed, at the point where the skeptic challenged you to adduce some recalled mental fact in order to discount the grue-interpretations, to recall precisely your former intention with respect to the

use of 'green'. To be sure, 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 recognize the adequacy of the specification because you know of the content of the intention.

The point, in summary, is not that it is particularly *comfortable* to think of your former meaning of 'green' as consisting in your having had a certain general intention, construed along the lines of the intuitive conception, but rather that the skeptical argument has absolutely no destructive force against that proposal.

IV. KRIPKE'S WITTGENSTEIN

I conclude with but the briefest indication of the most important difference, as I see it, between Kripke's Wittgenstein and Wittgenstein.

There is an evident concern in the *Investigations* with a large class of psychological predicates which, like intention intuitively conceived, *seem* to have a content that can somehow transcend that of any accompanying thoughts in the subject's mind. Examples are: recalling how a piece of music goes (without hearing it right through "in one's head"); deciding to have a game of bridge (without thinking through all the rules); realizing how to continue a series (without *per impossible,* thinking through the entire infinite expansion); grasping the meaning of an expression "in a flash" (without having all its possible uses run before one's mind); and so on. Each of these predicates, it seems, can come to be true of a subject quite abruptly, yet involves some sort of reference to things he need not, on that occasion, think about explicitly. Wittgenstein thought that we were greatly prone to misunderstand the "grammar" of these notions and to form quite false pictures of the nature of the connection that obtains between the psychological state of someone of whom such a predicate comes to be true and the "absent aspects" noted in the parentheses above. In particular, there need be *no* connection between the subjective content, properly so regarded, of such states and the detail of the "absent aspects".[6] Accordingly, the *normative* power of intention—the determinacy, when it is determinate, in the matter of whether a particular course of conduct fulfills a prior intention—cannot always be accounted for by reference only to the previous subjective content of the subject's psychological states. Wittgenstein's conclusion, however, is

[6] For an excellent discussion of these examples, see Malcolm Budd, "Wittgenstein on Meaning, Interpretation and Rules," *Synthese,* LVIII, 3 (March 1984): 303–323.

emphatically *not* that there is no such thing as the fulfillment of a prior intention—the conclusion, in effect, of Kripke's skeptic.

> Is it correct for someone to say: "When I gave you this rule, I meant you to . . . in this case"? Even if he did not think of this case at all as he gave the rule? *Of course it is correct.* For "to mean it" did not mean: to think of it (*Investigations* §692; my italics).

Rather, a satisfactory philosophy of intention has to validate our claim to noninferential authority for our present (and previous) intentions without succumbing to the mythology of infinite, explicit introspectible content. The intuitive conception of intention utilized against Kripke's skeptic above perennially tempts us toward this mythology. But there has to be something right about it if—*pace* those who would wish to reanimate a dispositional account of meaning and intention—Kripke's skeptic is not to win the day.

It is this dilemma which is prominent in the last sections of part I of the *Investigations* (§ 591 to the conclusion), sections about whose evaluation there is so far little consensus. The insight that there *is* a problem here, of the most profound importance for the philosophies both of language and of mind—whether or not Wittgenstein solved it—is one of the principal lessons of the *Investigations,* and one which Kripke's book ought to make it easier to learn.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Frege's Conception of Numbers as Objects. CRISPIN WRIGHT. The Scots Philosophical Monograph Series. Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1983. xxi, 193 p. £8.50.

Despite its title, this book is no scholarly study of Frege on the numbers. Rather it is an original contribution to the philosophy of mathematics, an attempt to develop and defend the conception of numbers expressed in Frege's *Foundations of Arithmetic.* Wright takes this to consist of three independent elements: (1) number-theoretic realism—statements about the numbers are determinately true or false in virtue of states of the world irrespective of our ability to ascertain them; (2) number-theoretic platonism—the numbers "constitute a unique domain of genuine objects" (xx); (3) number-theoretic logicism—logic is the epistemological foundation for

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