

KRIPKE'S WITTGENSTEIN'S VIEW OF LANGUAGE AS A SOCIAL PRACTICE

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INTRODUCTION

Recently Saul Kripke has developed a new way of looking at later Wittgenstein's view that private language is impossible and language (or meaning, for that matter) cannot be conceived save as a *public or social institution*. In his influential book *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (1982), Kripke makes the far-reaching claim that Wittgenstein's work on rules occupies the central position in his later philosophy of language. Indeed Kripke also suggests that Wittgenstein's later views on mathematics, sensations, and other related topics, are best understood in the context of his discussion of rules.

According to Kripke the central question before Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* is: 'What does it mean to follow a rule?' Put differently Wittgenstein wants to find out whether or not we can ever *know* if we are following a rule. The significance of this question cannot be overemphasized both for Wittgenstein's later views on language, mathematics, psychological concepts etc. as well as in general. Take Wittgenstein's views on language, for example. One of the key ideas in *Philosophical Investigations* is the idea of language-games. But what is a language-game? Of course, each language-game is comprised of different *moves* that we make with words and sentences in accordance with certain rules. This means that the concept of rules is crucial for understanding Wittgenstein's notion of language-games. Also Wittgenstein's famous argument against the possibility of a private language (the so-called private language argument, or PLA for short) is connected (at least according to Kripke's interpretation) with his views on what it means to follow a rule.

However the concept of following a rule is of the greatest significance in general too. Almost all human activities are rule-governed activities. Language, science, morals, religion and all other important aspects of human cultures are governed by various sets of rules. So in asking "What

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of '125'. He insists that we always meant "quaddition" \oplus by 'plus' instead of addition. Where quaddition means:

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

Hence there is no reason for us to give '125' as a response to '68 + 57'. We never meant addition by 'plus'. There is no fact of the matter either in our past behaviour or in our mental states which would rule out the possibility that we meant quaddition by plus. The sceptic's point is perfectly general. In any new instance we can make our function accord with any interpretation that we choose to. Our past behaviour or our mental states can never determine our response in a new case uniquely. Kripke is careful to point out that the sceptic is not questioning our *present* usage of the word 'plus'. He understands perfectly well that by 'plus' we mean 'addition' and that the answer to '68 + 57' should be '125'. What the sceptic questions is whether our present usage agrees with our "*previous linguistic intentions*". (p.12). In Kripke's words:

The sceptic doubts whether any instructions I gave myself in the past compel (or Justify) the answer '125' rather than '5'. He puts the challenge in terms of a sceptical hypothesis about a change in my usage. Perhaps when I used the term 'plus' in the *past*, I always meant quus: by hypothesis I never gave myself any explicit direction that were incompatible with such a supposition. (p. 13).

Secondly, Kripke's sceptic insists that there are no "*behaviouristic limitations*" on the facts that we may bring up as an evidence for our meaning addition by 'Plus' and not quaddition. We are at a perfect liberty to come up with any facts whatsoever from our past history, i.e., both external behaviour and mental life. The sceptic insists that even if we were idealized, and had a perfect recall of our past behaviour, memories, thoughts, and images, we would still not be able to come up with any such facts. Given these considerations the conclusion seems inescapable that there is no fact about our past history, mental or behavioural, which constitutes our meaning or intending 'addition' by 'plus' rather than "quaddition".

It may be objected, Kripke says, that the sceptic is proceeding from a wrong model of what the mathematical function 'addition' is. It is not through a finite number of examples that we are supposed to "extrapolate" the whole table for this function. If this were the case we could, of course, make any function compatible with a finite number of examples. The right model of understanding a function is that we "learned — and internalized instructions for — a rule which determines how addition is to be continued". (p. 15). Our response to a new case of computation is neither "automatic" nor determined by any "past instructions" that we might have given ourselves. Instead we proceed according to an *algorithm* for 'addition' which we learned previously.

By blocking various possible proposals against the skeptical argument successfully, Kripke leads us to the following conclusion:

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). 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? (pp. 70–71).

THE SKEPTICAL SOLUTION

Kripke claims that Wittgenstein offers a “skeptical solution” to his skeptical paradox. A skeptical solution, according to Kripke, is the one in which you grant the skeptic his premises but, nevertheless, try to avoid his destructive conclusion by various means. Such a solution contrasts with what Kripke characterizes as a “straightforward solution” exactly in not challenging the skeptic’s premises. Historically, Berkley and Hume, according to Kripke, offer similar kind of sceptical solutions to the problems of physical bodies and causation respectively. “A sceptical solution of a sceptical philosophical problem begins by conceding 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).

Wittgenstein’s solution to the skeptical paradox is similarly skeptical. He grants the skeptic that there is no fact of the matter which constitutes our meaning, say, ‘W’ by W. In other words, Realism of the *Tractatus* that meaning of declarative sentences is to be explained in terms of their *truth conditions* is abandoned in *Philosophical Investigations*. Instead we are asked to look for “assertion conditions”, (anti-realist approach) in order to account for meaning. In Kripke’s words:

..... if we suppose that facts, or truth conditions, are of the essence of meaningful assertion, it will follow from the sceptical conclusion that assertions that anyone ever means anything are meaningless. On the other hand, if we apply to these assertions the tests suggested in *Philosophical Investigations*, no such conclusion follows. All that is needed to legitimize assertions that someone means something is that there be roughly specifiable circumstances under which they are legitimately assertable, and that the game of asserting them under such conditions has a role in our lives. No supposition that ‘facts correspond’ to those assertions is needed. (pp. 77–78).

These “assertion conditions” and this “role in our lives”, according to Kripke, “involves reference to a community”. Assertibility conditions for statements like:

finite number of tokens there is no fact of the matter what type they are tokens of, so there is no fact of the matter whether another token is or is not of the same type". (p. 24). For example, he says '5' 'five', and 'V', are different tokens but they are not different responses to the problem '68+57'. Because, presumably, all these tokens belong to the same type. But Wittgenstein's skeptical hypotheses block exactly this move. From a finite number of tokens we can never tell which type they are tokens of. Therefore, from a finite number of tokens we can never tell that '125' and '5' are tokens of different types and hence different responses to '68+57'. This argument leads Hoffman to the following conclusion: "If there is no such thing as responding one way or another, then there can be no such thing as agreement in responses, and hence, no public language. Therefore, the skeptical solution Kripke attributes to Wittgenstein is no solution at all, because it is subject to the very skeptical hypotheses it is designed to circumvent". (p. 26).

Hoffman informs us that Kripke's text anticipates these deeper implications of Wittgenstein's paradox in a footnote added in proof. Kripke writes:

If Wittgenstein had been attempting to give a necessary and sufficient condition to show that '125', not '5', is the 'right' response to '68+57', he might be charged with circularity. For he might be taken to say that my response is correct if and only if it agrees with that of others. But even if the skeptic and I both accept this criterion in advance, might not the skeptic maintain, that just as I was wrong about what '+' meant in the past, so I was wrong about 'agree'? Indeed, to attempt to reduce the rule for addition to another rule "Respond to an addition problem exactly as others do!" — falls foul of Wittgenstein's strictures on 'a rule for interpreting a rule' just as much as any other attempted reduction.....

What Wittgenstein is doing is describing the utility in our lives of a certain practice. Necessarily he must give this description in our own language. As in the case of any such use of our language, a participant in another form of life might apply various terms in the description (such as "agreement") in a non-standard 'quus-like' way. Indeed, we may judge that those in a given community 'agree' while someone in another form of life would judge that they do not. (p. 146).

Kripke goes on to inform us that "this objection cannot be an objection to Wittgenstein's solution unless he is to be prohibited from any use of language at all". Hoffman agrees, but says that this Kripkean response is unsatisfactory on two counts. First, it fails to inform us why should we treat "the notion of agreement" differently from "the notion of justified responses". Why is it the case that the skeptical challenge is applicable to the second notion only. Second, "if proceeding blindly is good enough for

Also once the notion of assertibility conditions is sharply distinguished from justification conditions, the distinction between public and private languages can be rehabilitated. Kripke thinks that for Wittgenstein my confident assertion that I mean W by 'W' is open to revision by rest of the linguistic community in case of public language. For private language, however, that becomes impossible. For a private linguist it is *not* possible ever to name a false belief. *Thinking* that he is right and his *being* right are one and the same thing for a private linguist. The distinction between the public and private languages does not hinge on the fact that while the former has justification(s) (like agreement etc.) and the latter does not. The distinction, according to Kripke, lies in the fact that his assertibility conditions do not obtain in case of private language. On a private model there is no procedure for distinguishing correct from an incorrect use of a word. On public model, however, my feeling of confidence to make a certain utterance is subject to communal approval. Not that communal approval makes my utterance *right* but only that conformity with the communal practice has a *utility* in our lives.

Crispin Wright brings up a different kind of objection against Kripke's solution. He claims that "if the truth value of S is determined by its meaning and the state of the world in relevant respects, then non-factuality in one of the determinants can be expected to induce non-factuality in the outcome. A projectivist view of meaning is thus, it appears, going to enjoin a projectivist view of what it is for a statement to be true". (p. 769).

Wright claims that this would hold for the *truth* of assertibility conditions of sentences themselves as well. From these observations he concludes "that the premises, requisite for Kripke's version of 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". (p. 770).

This objection against Kripke seems wide off the mark. Kripke never intends his assertibility conditions of statements concerning meaning to be "genuinely factual". His assertibility conditions are not meant at all to supply us with facts that would justify our statements concerning meaning. They are meant to outline circumstances in which such statements are made and play a role in our lives. Also Kripke's assertibility conditions, though non-factual, do not amount to a projectivist theory of language. Meaning is not individual or communal *projection* for Kripke. (Indeed his assertibility conditions would allow for so-called fact stating utterances. Such a language-game would be at par with any other language-game).

If Kripke were to give a projectivist view of meaning his solution would be a straight-solution rather than a skeptical one. For then he would be denying skeptic's premises that there is no fact of the matter that constitutes meaningful language. Individual or communal projections would be exactly such a fact of the matter.

does it mean to follow a rule"?. Wittgenstein is asking a very fundamental question.

It goes to Kripke's credit that he has emphasized the centrality of this theme in Wittgenstein. However Kripke believes that Wittgenstein is skeptical regarding our knowledge of rules. According to Kripke, at the heart of Wittgenstein's discussion of rules is what Kripke calls Wittgenstein's "skeptical paradox". This paradox is stated in section 201 of the *Philosophical Investigations*. Wittgenstein says: "This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule".

This is obviously a very puzzling statement. Ordinarily we believe that a rule determines exactly what needs to be done in a given situation. However Wittgenstein seems to reject this ordinary view of rules. According to him anything we do can be made to accord with any rule whatever. It is this skeptical paradox about the rules which Kripke elaborates, and works out the implications of, in his book. According to Kripke, Wittgenstein also offers a "skeptical solution" of this paradox, and his skeptical solution makes private language impossible. In other words it is Wittgenstein's skeptical solution of his own skeptical paradox about rules which establishes that language (or meaning) is a social institution; the only language that is possible is the public language.

In this paper I first give an exposition of Kripke's presentation of Wittgenstein's skeptical paradox and its solution, and then defend Kripke's position against two of his critics, i.e., Paul Hoffman and Crispin Wright. Hoffman believes that the so-called skeptical solution that Kripke attributes to Wittgenstein is not a solution of the paradox at all. Crispin Wright, however, thinks that Kripke's solution leads to an untenable projectivism about language. I'll develop arguments to show that Kripke's solution not only works but it is also not based on a projectivist approach to language.

THE SKEPTICAL PARADOX

Kripke develops the skeptical paradox through a mathematical example. The symbol '+', as we know, stands for the mathematical function 'addition'. Once we have a "grasp" of the rule behind this function we can respond to indefinitely many new cases of computation. In each new case that confronts us we just have to follow the rule in order for our responses to conform with the function. In other words, our understanding of the rule determines our future responses, or, helps us detect errors in our own or other people's responses. Now, as is the nature of things, we cannot but have performed only a finite number of computations at any given point of time. Kripke wants us to imagine that we have never computed '68 + 57' before. Confronted with this new case we shall, of course, respond with '125' as an answer. It is at this point that Kripke's sceptic enters into the picture. The sceptic claims that our response should have been '5' instead

Kripke claims that such an objection cannot block the skeptical argument. He reminds us of Wittgenstein's remarks about "a rule for interpreting a rule" here. "It is tempting to answer the sceptic by appealing from one rule to another more 'basic' rule. But the sceptical move can be repeated at the more 'basic' level also". (p. 17). In the end, therefore, nothing justifies our application of a rule. "It is an unjustified stab in the dark". (p. 17). Clearly then, we are driven to the conclusion that there is no fact of the matter which constitutes our meaning or intending 'plus' by plus and not 'quus' or, for that matter, our meaning or intending anything by any word. "It seems that the entire idea of meaning vanishes into thin air". (p. 22).

At this point Kripke considers some possible attempts at answering the skeptic. Perhaps the clue to our meaning or intending 'W' by W lies in our 'disposition' to do so. Or, perhaps we have an "irreducible experience" that constitutes our meaning such-and-such by thus-and-so. Kripke does a brilliant critique of these two proposals and finds them quite unsuccessful against the skeptic. He sums up his basic criticism of a "dispositional theory" in the following words:

If the dispositionalist attempts to define which function I meant as the function determined by the answer I am disposed to give for arbitrarily large arguments, he ignores the fact that my dispositions extend to only finitely many cases. If he tries to appeal to my responses under idealized conditions that overcome this finiteness, he will succeed only if the idealization includes a specification that I will still respond, under these idealized conditions, according to the infinite table of the function I actually meant. But then the circularity of the procedure is evident. The idealized dispositions are determinate only because it is already settled which function I meant. (p. 28).

Also Kripke points out that the dispositionalist must face yet another difficulty. A subject can be disposed to make mistakes. On a dispositional account this would simply mean *using* a word in a non-standard manner. But that obviously is not what our common sense view of a mistake is.

Regarding the proposal that our meaning, say, W by 'W' may consist in "an irreducible experience, with its own special quale, known directly to each of us by introspection", Kripke informs us that it begs the question. Apart from "the dubiousness of the attribution of a special qualitative character to the experience of meaning addition by 'plus'," it can be plainly seen that each time we confront a new case of computation we will have to recall how such an experience was associated with our meaning 'plus' by plus. This, obviously, would be impossible without recalling our former understanding of 'plus'. But it is exactly such a *former understanding* which, the skeptic contends, is compatible with 'quus'. Hence postulation of an *irreducible experience* as constitutive of meaning cannot help us against the skeptical argument.

(1) I mean W by 'W'

are primarily my "confidence" that I am using 'W' satisfactorily, and approval of my use of 'W' by my linguistic community. In other words when I am confident that I am using 'W' correctly and when the linguistic community approves my usage of 'W', the assertibility conditions for (1) are fulfilled. It is obvious from these assertibility conditions that meaning something by something is essentially a social phenomenon. It is this social character of meaning which allows Kripke to interpret PLA in his special way. He claims that assertibility conditions are "inapplicable to a single person considered in isolation". (p. 79). The reason is that in such a case it is impossible to distinguish my "thinking" that I mean W by 'W' and my "meaning" W by 'W' (cf. *Philosophical Investigations*, 202). Community, therefore, emerges as the touchstone of *following a rule*. No rule can be followed privately, no meaning can be conceived save as a social institution. These considerations lead Kripke to conclude that Wittgenstein's discussion of sensation and mathematics are nothing more than considerations of two purported counterexample to his claims about following a rule.

Kripke is careful to distinguish his skeptical solution from conventionalism at this point. He says: "that Wittgenstein's theory is one of assertibility conditions deserves emphasis. Wittgenstein's theory should not be confused with a theory that 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." (pp. 110–11). Such a theory, according to Kripke, would be a theory of truth conditions. Wittgenstein, however, is not concerned with providing communal agreement as justification of what we *mean* by a word etc. Indeed, that's exactly the sort of picture that he wants to reject through his skeptical argument. His assertibility conditions provide us only with rough specifications of circumstances in which we play a language-game and how such activity (of playing a language-game) has a "role" in our lives.

SKEPTICAL SOLUTION REVISITED

Kripke's skeptical solution has elicited some really violent criticisms from recent authors on the subject. Paul Hoffman (1985) for example, declares that Kripke's solution is not a solution at all. For Crispin Wright, on the other hand, Kripke's solution leads to an untenable projectivism about language. In what follows I'll consider Hoffman's criticism first and then move on to Wright.

Hoffman claims that Wittgenstein's "skeptical hypotheses" strike a much deeper chord than what is recognized by Kripke's skeptical solution. Hoffman argues that given Wittgenstein's skeptical hypotheses there can be no such thing as '125' being a different response than '5' to the problem '68+57'. For in order for '125' and '5' to be different responses we must already know that they belong, as tokens, to two different types. But this cannot be. Because, on Hoffman's reformulation of the paradox: "for any

public language, why is it not good enough for private language", or, "why public agreement should succeed in a way private agreement cannot". (p. 27). That is to say, why should we accept public language on the basis of a seeming agreement in our responses but do not do the same for private language in a similar situation.

One way to counter Hoffman's criticisms of Kripke is to insist upon a sharp distinction between *assertibility conditions* and truth/justification conditions¹ of utterances. George Rudebusch (1985) seems to have taken a similar line. His basic claim is that Hoffman confuses Kripke's solution with a conventionalist/relativist approach which takes *communal agreement* as basis for our meaning, say, addition by 'plus'. Kripke, as noted in the previous section, distinguishes his solution from a conventionalist/relativist approach. He would agree with Hoffman that there is no reason for us to treat the "notion of agreement" differently from "the notion of justified responses". If *communal agreement* is supplied as a *justification* for meaning then it would be/should be open to Wittgenstein's skeptical hypotheses.

Kripke's solution, however, is anti-realist in the sense that it provides us with assertibility conditions for uttering a word or a sentence. Such conditions do not *justify* our utterances but under "roughly specifiable circumstances" we make these utterance and the game of making these utterances has a *utility* in our lives. Rudebusch warns us that Kripke's use of the phrase "specifiable circumstances" should be taken with some reservation. It is not that the circumstances under which we make an assertion are *linguistically specifiable*. For in that case our assertibility conditions will beg the question of rendering language meaningful. All that Kripke needs to say is that whenever we have an (introspectible) *feeling of confidence* that now we can go on, the circumstances for making an utterance get obtained. And if this introspectible feeling of confidence is coupled with some utility of that utterance in our lives then the assertibility conditions for the utterance get obtained. Another distinction that needs to be made at this point is that *understanding* for Wittgenstein is different from "feeling of confidence" in the sense that it is *not* introspectible. It is this difference between the two notions which makes it possible for Kripke to rely on (introspectible) "feeling of confidence" as an element in his anti-realist solution. It must be remarked however that "feeling of confidence", like *understanding*, is an irreducible experience. But Kripke is *not* offering it as a *justification* of meaningful utterances. On the other hand, "feelings of confidence" are (introspectible) circumstances under which we make utterances, not with justification, but simply because such utterances have a utility in our lives.

This should apparently take care of Hoffman's worry that "for any finite number of tokens there is no fact of the matter which type they are tokens of". Obviously, Kripke could agree but bring up his assertibility conditions which make it possible for us to say which type a certain token belongs to, although, without justification.

It seems reasonable, therefore, to conclude from the foregoing considerations that Kripke's skeptical solution, although much misunderstood by his critics, does seem to work against the skeptical paradox. The central idea of the paradox is that truth-conditions do not contribute anything to our linguistic understanding of a statement. The solution brings out the conditions which do make contribution towards our linguistic understanding, and hence it successfully silences the skeptic.

NOTES

1. Although Kripke uses the phrases 'assertibility conditions' and 'justification conditions' interchangeably, he points out the difficulties of such a use in his footnote 63. I prefer, however, to confine use of the phrase 'justification conditions' for truth conditional approaches to meaning.

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