**Explaining away Kripke’s Wittgenstein**

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*Introduction*

Saul Kripke’s *Wittgenstein on rules and private language* (*WRPL*) presents a problem for the very possibility of meaning and thought (1982, 7-54). This is the infamous “sceptical paradox” of rule-following that Kripke finds in his influential reading of Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical investigations* (2001 [1951]). Although the conclusion of the paradox seems “absolutely wild,” Kripke makes a formidable case (Kripke 1982, 9).[[1]](#endnote-1)

To briefly preview the paradox: if someone means something by a word, then certain uses of the word will be correct, and others incorrect. It is correct to say, “That’s a dog” of the family canine, but incorrect to say it of most other things. But if *nothing* makes it correct (or incorrect) for the speaker to use a word one way rather than another, then she does not mean anything. The paradox, an argument from elimination, tries to show that nothing makes uses of words correct (or incorrect). It purports to refute all the plausible accounts of a fact that could do the trick. Some of these accounts rely on the speaker’s possession of other intentional contents, which, per Kripke, illicitly begs the question. Other accounts do not. Unfortunately, they incur undue metaphysical mystery, or fail to do justice to features of meaning too intuitive to lose. Therefore, words do not mean anything. In fact, there would be no such thing as intentionality—the paradox applies to thought just as easily as linguistic expression. (For an official statement of the paradox, see §1.)

This paper refutes the paradox with a dilemma. The dilemma is revealed by an examination of the methods that rational, linguistic beings use to understand one another. Intentional states are posited in *rational explanation*.(See §2.) Rational explanations are explanations of subjects’ actions and thoughts in terms of what subjects have (or take themselves to have) reason to do and think. For most theorists, to explain a subject’s thought or action with reference to her reasons involves ascribing propositional attitudes. The possession of these attitudes’ intentional contents is ascribed to her, as well. (Call the one ascribing content possession the *interpreter*, and the one to whom she ascribes it the *ascribee*.)

The anti-skeptical dilemma that I will advance is as follows: either rational explanation is merely a causal, empirical form of explanation, or it is not. If the former, then the paradox rests on a mistake about the requirements for intentionality. (See §3.) The paradox supposes there are certain *a priori* requirements for intentional states that are not satisfiable. These requirements no longer apply if rational explanation turns out to be merely empirical. On this view, intentional states just turn out to be theoretical posits in empirical psychology; we are justified in asserting their existence to the extent that we are justified in quantifying over the theoretical posits of any well-confirmed empirical explanation. Hence this conception of rational explanation, if accurate, dissolves the paradox.

If rational explanation is not merely a causal form of explanation, then it is also normative.[[2]](#endnote-2) (See §4.) On this conception, interpreters hold ascribees up to standards for correct thought and action. If this is right, then the paradox’s challenge to the existence of correct uses must be answered by presupposing that the speaker possesses other determinate contents. The paradox finds this illicit. Yet, it provides no good reason for the dismissal. Given this form of rational explanation, interpreters *legitimately* presuppose that ascribees already possess some contents. The metaphysical consequences of this method might not be consistent with the skeptic’s argument, but nothing in the paradox shows that we should prefer the skeptical conclusion to the method’s anti-skeptical consequences. So, given this form of rational explanation, the paradox fails.

Whichever approach to rational explanation is right, intentionality is saved.

*1. The Skeptical Paradox*

*1.1 Background*

Kripke presents the paradox through an example. His skeptical persona—call it “the skeptic”—asks a standard English speaker to answer, “68 + 57 = ?”. This speaker means the same thing all standard English speakers mean by “+,” if anything. She has not previously considered this problem. After reckoning, she answers, “125” (ibid., 8). (Hereafter, I use small uppercase script to denote intensional contents/meanings and single quotations for symbols. Example: when the symbol ‘dog’ bears the content dog, it is “dog.”) The skeptic assumes for *reductio* that the speaker in fact means plus by ‘+’ at the moment, so 125 is right.[[3]](#endnote-3) But in comes his “sceptical hypothesis”: given what the speaker meant with her uses of the symbol ‘+’ before being asked about 68 + 57, she should have answered “5” (ibid.). This is because, the skeptic hypothesizes, by ‘+’ the speaker did not mean addition or plus before now, but *quaddition* or *quus*. quus is a permutation of plus. The quaddition function shares its outputs with addition for all values the speaker had computed before. At 68 + 57, however, the functions diverge. Quaddition specifies *5* as the output, not 125 (ibid., 9). Thus, the skeptic asks: what about the speaker rules out that she meant quus? If nothing does, the assumption that she means plus now is false.

A “quus”-like hypothesis—“qu”-hypothesis, for short—could be raised about any of the speaker’s words. Imagine the smitten speaker utters, “I love Sarah” for the first time. The skeptic can ask: “Was that assertion consistent with your past meaning of ‘love’? When you said things of the form ‘*x* loves *y*’ before, did you mean love, or quove, where quoving is loving non-Sarahs and hating Sarah?” Certainly, there is much to say in response to “qu”-questions—that is for later. The point here is just that there have to be sufficient answers to these questions if the speaker means anything.

Kripke repeatedly stresses that the paradox is *metaphysical,* not just epistemological (ibid., 21, 39). The skeptic argues there is *no fact about* what the speaker means, not (just) that the speaker does not know her meaning. This is nihilism about meaning. If the qu-question cannot be answered, there is no meaning to know. Hence anti-skeptics are permitted to cite any fact in the universe to show that the speaker means plus—not merely facts the speaker knows. The skeptic has to grapple with an anti-skeptic apprised of our best approximation of the “God’s Eye View” on the speaker and world (ibid., 21).

The skeptic offers two necessary conditions for meaning that supposedly undermine every possible anti-skeptical reply to qu-questions. If the speaker ought to answer “125”—which, if she means plus by ‘+’ and intends to speak truth, she ought—then there is some state of her mind that makes it so. Call this, as Kripke does, her “grasp” of “+” (ibid., 7). So the first necessary condition is obvious.

*The Mental Condition (MC)*: The anti-skeptic “must give an account of what fact it is (about my mental state) that constitutes my meaning plus, not quus” (ibid., 11).

“But further, there is a condition that any putative candidate for such a fact must satisfy” (ibid.).

*The Justification Condition (JC)*: The grasp proposed by the anti-skeptic must “show how” the speaker is “justified” in answering “125,” not “5.” (ibid.)[[4]](#endnote-4),[[5]](#endnote-5)

Because each candidate fails to make “125” the answer the speaker “‘ought’ to give”, the speaker means nothing (ibid., 11, 55).

The conditions initially seem easy to satisfy. Yet, they are not. Qu-questions are given traction by the *infinitary projectability* of meaning. A little reflection on words, application conditions, and possibility at least strongly suggests that all words have infinitely many cases of potential use. The skeptic exploits as much: there are infinitely many assertions of in/correct sums one could make with “+.” There are (presumably) infinitely many cases in which it would be in/correct to apply “loves” to some *x* and *y*, etc. At minimum, any given word can be applied in infinitely many different sentences in infinitely many different situations, actual or possible, such that the word has the same meaning in all of them and there is a fact about whether the application is correct. Speakers, however, are finite. No speaker has used a word in all its application conditions. The skeptic can always devise a case in which the speaker’s prior behavior hasn’t settled the correct use in the “present” of the skeptical encounter.[[6]](#endnote-6)

The following condition clarifies the ramifications of infinitary projection for the speaker’s grasp. (As an implication of MC and JC, it is not an independent condition.)

*Infinitary Projection Requirement (IPR)*: If *S* possesses concept *c* (i.e., can think thoughts containing *c* or mean *c* by a public linguistic symbol), then *S* can have, token, or produce a bearer of *c* in thought or public linguistic expression such that *S*’s past behavior and present mental state together imply that the bearer’s infinitary application conditions are those for *c* and only *c*.

*1.2 The Skeptical Regress*

The paradox is an argument from elimination. If the speaker means plus by “+,” the speaker’s grasp entails that 125, not 5, is the answer dictated by what she means. This fact must satisfy MC, JC, and IPR. If no fact does so, the speaker means nothing. So the skeptic sets out to eliminate all plausible anti-skeptical conceptions of this fact.

The *skeptical regress* is the paradox’s centerpiece (ibid., 15-17, 21). The regress eliminates almost every anti-skeptical proposal, whether directly (via refutation) or indirectly (by revealing extreme unpalatability). It rules out any account of the speaker’s grasp that appeals to her other intentional contents.[[7]](#endnote-7)

The skeptical regress assembles the introduced machinery into a potent challenge. It shows that no grasp of a word can render the word’s application conditions determinate (see MC, IPR) or entail that the speaker’s applications are justified (see JC, IPR). Kripke deploys it in explicit form against the anti-skeptic’s first conception of the grasp of ‘+’: that the application conditions are fixed (and uses justified) by an algorithm for use that the speaker can call to mind. The algorithm basically dictates: for any *x + y*, count out *x* marbles, then *y* marbles, then merge them into a pile. Count the pile: the result is the answer (ibid., 15). But, if the algorithm is her grasp, she must grasp count, a constituent of it. If some fact about the speaker satisfies MC for “count,” it must also justify “count”’s use in the algorithm and her description of it. However, this just invites the skeptic to ask another qu-question: what about her makes ‘count’ mean count, not quount? The regress is off and running.

Three anti-skeptical proposals—qualitative states of understanding (ibid., 41-51), “*sui generis*” intentional states (ibid., 51-54), and mental connections to determinate Fregean senses (ibid., 54-5)—avoid the regress in the least effective way possible. They fail even to answer the initial “plus or quus?” question, suffering defeat before the regress starts. They say nothing about how such states could assign plus to ‘+’ or justify the speaker’s uses. As for “+,” so, too for any other word or putatively contentful state. There is no intentionality.

Any proposal that overcomes the skeptical regress (without undue unpalatability) thereby defeats the paradox.

*2. Rational Explanation: General Details*

The paradox puts faulty requirements on the *method* by which interpreters ascribe intentionality. The two plausible conceptions of this method are rather different. But the paradox fails against both (for different reasons, respectively).

Like many features of the world, the contents we possess are somehow just evident to us. Pens and jars are part of our commonsense ontology. Basically nobody believes in them merely because of their use-value in causal explanation. The same goes for intentional contents. Kripke seems to share this attitude. The paradox attempts annihilate an evident feature of our minds, not some theoretical *explanans*.

But philosophers often cite contents to explain what people do and think. Contents are integral to our propositional attitudes, which are the things in virtue of which we think and act rationally.[[8]](#endnote-8) Intentional contents are explanatory entities in rational explanations.

Rational explanation (hereinafter “RE”) shares a distinctive feature with the explanations in the special sciences. It works well as a platform for characterizing RE as such. A special science is one whose laws or generalizations contain “hedges,” or *ceteris paribus* clauses—*ceteris paribus*, events of type *A* cause events of *B*; i.e., *A*-events cause *B*-events, provided certain other conditions hold (see esp. Fodor 1974). All REs rely on hedged laws, implicitly or explicitly.[[9]](#endnote-9) Given that a subject believes this and intends that, she will, *ceteris paribus*, do thus-and-so or think such-and-such. Often, however, subjects do believe this and intend that, but do not do as the laws predict. This is frequently not the law’s fault. The law, as hedged, admits certain exceptions.

Broadly speaking, there are two conceptions of rational explanation. RE is either purely causal or irreducibly normative.[[10]](#endnote-10) Call them *Austere* and *Evaluative* RE.[[11]](#endnote-11) The difference between them emerges in how each copes with the following oft-cited insight:

[C]oncepts of the propositional attitudes have their proper home in explanations of a special sort: explanations in which things are made intelligible by being revealed to be, or approximate to being, as they rationally ought to be. This is to be contrasted with a style of explanation in which one makes things intelligible by representing their coming into being as a particular instance of how things tend to happen (McDowell 1998, 328).[[12]](#endnote-12)

The difference in how the two conceptions deal with McDowell’s claim manifests as a difference between their conceptions of hedged laws.

*3. Austere RE’s Solution*

If RE is purely causal—i.e., Austere—then REs are just empirical special-scientific explanations. Intentional states are posits used to explain why events happen, just like mitochondria or solar flares.[[13]](#endnote-13) Irrationality comprises one interfering factor that *ceteris paribus* clauses hedge against. Someone can believe that *p* and intend to make it the case that *q* given *p*, but fail to “put two and two together” and act on the intention. Certain actions and judgments are explicable *as* irrational, *as* exceptions hedged against that nevertheless occur.

Under Austere RE, then, McDowell’s contrast between rational explanation and other kinds is not strictly true. There is no sense, as far as explaining behavior is concerned, in which it is *correct* or *incorrect* for a subject to do this-or-that (or that she *ought* or *ought not* do it) over and above that it is certain or likely she *will* or *will not*, *would* or *would not*. Correctness reduces to descriptive or predictive properties, from the perspective of behavioral explanation. Perhaps it is four times more likely, given some set of attitudes, that a subject *ϕ*’s than *ψ*’s, where *ϕ*-ing is something we normally describe as “adding correctly” and *ψ*-ing as “adding incorrectly.” Yet, there is nothing irreducibly normative involved.[[14]](#endnote-14)

*Austere Rational Explanation*: Rational explanations are purely empirical explanations that utilize hedged laws to explain what subjects do/not do and think, and predict and explain what subjects will/not do and think.

*3.1 Methodology and Simplicity*

Austere RE understands content ascription as follows. The interpreter observes the ascribee’s behavior. The interpreter explains the behavior with an empirical theory that ascribes propositional attitudes, which have contents. The theory is confirmed or infirmed in the same manner as any empirical theory—so, too, for its ontology. The ascriptions are true if the explanation is, too.

 The relative *simplicity* of an empirical theory is often a reason to prefer it. The virtue of simplicity, though difficult to formulate precisely, is easy to comprehend in the broad strokes of a rough-and-ready sketch of the epistemology of empirical science. Assume that hypotheses are theories. An *adequate* theory is one that, if true, would explain the data. An adequate theory is simpler than another just when it requires fewer posits (including objects, forces, processes, and mechanisms) and/or unvindicated assumptions than the other.[[15]](#endnote-15) Since investigators are epistemically limited, many different theories are adequate at any given time. Only one can be true.[[16]](#endnote-16)

At one point, Kripke pauses to reject appeals to simplicity:

Let no one […] suggest that the hypothesis that I meant plus is to be preferred as the *simplest* hypothesis. […] [A]n appeal [to simplicity] must be based either on a misunderstanding of the sceptical problem, or the role of simplicity considerations, or both. Recall that the sceptical problem was not purely epistemic. The sceptic argues that there is no fact 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 hypotheses 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’? (1982, 38)

 Kripke’s objection would work if the anti-skeptic had to specify how the contents posited by the plus- and quus-hypotheses satisfy MC, JC, and IPR. Kripke thinks that without this specification, appeal to simplicity would beg the skeptic’s question about how anything could even *be* the hypothesized grasp—about what these hypotheses are really, well, hypothesizing. They would be positing “contents,” that, if the skeptic is right, do not meet the necessary conditions for being contents. Appeal to simplicity does nothing.

Yet if RE is Austere, the posits do *not* have to satisfy the *a priori* metaphysical conditions MC, JC, and IPR. They just have to meet the same requirements as any other posit in an empirical theory. We *do* ‘understand what the two hypotheses state’ well enough (ibid.). They each state a different explanation for the speaker’s past and present behavior with “+”. So, given Austere RE, Kripke’s objection to the use of simplicity considerations fails.

To determine the correct Austere RE, the interpreter conducts scientific inquiry, with access to all the epistemic tools such inquiry permits. One handy tool: simplicity comparison. The plus- and quus-hypotheses are equally adequate to the behavioral data. This makes sense—the quus*-*hypothesis is by stipulation consistent with the speaker’s past behavior. If the plus-hypothesis were uniquely adequate to some known datum, the paradox would not even be a *prima facie* problem. But we do not know of anything that renders the plus-hypothesis strictly more adequate than the quus-hypothesis, hence the resort to simplicity. Despite these epistemic shortcomings, our Austere REs of English speakers’ behavior consider the quus-hypothesis very improbable.[[17]](#endnote-17)

As the method of content ascription, Austere RE does not illicitly presuppose that intentional states exist. Rather, explanatory success *provides evidence* that intentional states exist. If our best RE posits intentional states and achieves sufficient confirmation, then we have sufficient reason to believe in intentional states. (Put differently, Austere RE has it that our best approximation of the God’s Eye View on the speaker’s behavior is our bestempirical perspectiveon it.) So the skeptic’s *a priori* metaphysical requirements (MC, JC, and IPR) do not matter. The only standard for intentional states’ non-/existence is their success in causal explanations of behavior.

*3.2 Content’s Empirical Status Defuses Kripke’s Metaphysical Worry*

Intentional states are well-confirmed posits, worthy of quantification, even ifthey do not satisfy the skeptic’s *a priori* metaphysical conditions. They exist if the empirical explanations referring to them are true, and we are justified in believing in intentional contents to the extent we are justified in believing that the explanations are true. At this point the anti-skeptic can, with total right, convert the skeptic’s conclusion that intentional content is impossible into a conclusion about what properties real, existing intentional content does *not* have.

So if Austere RE is right, none of the anti-skeptical proposals Kripke rejects in *WPRL* describe content accurately. Austere RE does not claim that internalized algorithms for use fix intentional contents (Kripke 1982, 15-21). Its ascriptions do not track the speaker’s “qualitative feelings” of understanding alone. The states could be dispositional, in a way, and primitive, in a way (ibid., 22-37, 51-53). Even so, the skeptic’s critiques of dispositionalism and primitivism founder against Austere RE’s understanding of the proverbial ‘sense in which’ content states qualify as either. The interpreter need not *identify* intentional states with dispositions. The ascribed propositional attitudes are probably dispositional in some sense. Subjects probably have certain dispositions in virtue of possessing certain contents.[[18]](#endnote-18) Because Jill Sixpack has attitudes *P1, P2…Pn*, she will, *ceteris paribus*, *ϕ* today, *ψ* tonight, judge that *p* tomorrow, etc. But intentional states do not have to *be* dispositions. Austere RE requires only that the states explain behavior; it does not scry into their metaphysics, determining whether grasps are essentiallydispositional. Moreover, since they need only be posits in a true RE, intentional states might be “primitive” or “*sui generis*” in that they might not be definable in nonintentional terms.

Nor are Austere RE’s intentional states queer, as Kripke thinks primitive grasps are (ibid., 51-53). Like many special-scientific posits—mitochondria and solar flares included—Austere RE’s intentional states supervene on causally basic reality.[[19]](#endnote-19) The states do not emerge *ex nihilo*. The structure and function at the causally basic levels fix intentional facts such that any worlds identical in all nonintentional facts identify in intentional facts. In fact, all existing posits of special sciences are related to the causally basic reality in the same way. In any worlds nonintentionally identical to ours, standard Anglophones mean plus by ‘+.’[[20]](#endnote-20) (Perhaps intentional states supervene on specific subsets of facts in worlds. If so, any worlds sharing these subsets are identical in intentional facts.)[[21]](#endnote-21)

*3.3 Against Methodological Complaints*

There are two feasible ways for Kripke to resist Austere RE’s solution. He could show that rational explanation is bad empirical science; or, that Austere RE would be just as successful even if there were no intentional states.

*WRPL* never contends the former, which leaves the latter—a claim Kripke never substantiates. As already argued, an Austere RE’s high adequacy and simplicity together give good reason to believe in the intentional states it posits. Simplicity considerations neutralize permutations, like quus. Kripke’s arguments against the anti-skeptical proposals in *WRPL* do not touch intentional content as Austere RE understands it.

Maybe our “good reason” to believe in intentional states is not enough. After all, even maximal confirmation of an empirical theory may fail to confer sufficient reason to believe its theoretical posits exist (e.g., Van Fraassen 1980; Fine 1984). Under Austere RE, intentional states are theoretical posits in an empirical theory, hence not directly observable. But were the skeptic to appeal to these positions, he would merely be invoking anti- (or non-)realism about empirical theoretical entities *tout court*. That sort of skepticism applies to intentional content *just as much* as mitochondria or solar flares—it is simply not the paradox. Hence the paradox cannot use anti- or nonrealism about theoretical entities as a premise.

Certainly, we cannot be certain *a priori* that science will vindicate content. Paradigms shift; the basic ontology of some research programs condemns those programs to obsolescence. That fate may await intentionality. *Que sera sera*, though. The new psychological theory will better capture the phenomena. And if *that* happens, then no one really means or thinks anything—due in no part, however, to the paradox.

To show that Austere RE’s success does not provide reason to believe in intentional states (while not relying on general anti- or nonrealism about theoretical entities), the skeptic must offer some special reason to be an anti-realist about intentional content even if Austere REs are credible. Relative simplicity, then, would not matter, as no hypothesis in an Austere RE, however simple, could establish that its posited contents exist.

Unfortunately for Kripke, the skeptic can only argue as much by claiming that the posited contents cannot satisfy MC, JC, and/or IPR; as already shown, though, intentional contents do not have to satisfy these conditions if RE is Austere.

Kripke is out of options. Austere RE dissolves the paradox.

*4. Evaluative RE’s Solution*

Does Evaluative RE give the paradox a foothold? Under this version, RE still has causal-explanatory value, but it offers more than causal explanation. After presenting its details (§§4.1), I will argue that Evaluative RE strips the paradox’s regress of its skeptical upshot (§§4.2-4.6).

*4.1 The Distinctiveness of Evaluative RE*

Like its Austere rival, Evaluative RE conceives rational explanations as predicting and explaining thought and behavior with hedged laws. Yet, unlike Austere RE, it accepts McDowell’s dictum about the ‘proper home’ of propositional-attitude explanations as literally true, no reduction necessary. Under Evaluative RE, rational explanation is distinct from explanation that does not advert to the evaluative properties of the things and events concerned. What happens is really correct or incorrect; there are things rational subjects ought or ought not do or think.[[22]](#endnote-22) People believe truly, infer correctly, use apt heuristics, intend proper actions, etc. Sometimes people think or act incorrectly, despite possessing the propositional attitudes to do otherwise.[[23]](#endnote-23) (Compare this with what Kripke says about concept-use and correctness. That a speaker means plus by “+” must explain both what she answers and whether it was correct.)

Since Evaluative RE gives correctness independence from what the subject will/would do, it owes some account of what explanatory role the correctness status plays over and above “will/would.” One could question whether the evaluative properties of the states do any explanatory work. If I go to Oslo because I believe going there is best, then the belief’s correctness might not add anything. Correct or not, the belief explains my trip.

As presaged in the McDowell passage, the need for *charity* in interpretation makes evaluative properties of acts and attitudes ineliminable in Evaluative RE. Much of what rational beings do is explained by the fact that what they do and think is (or approximates) what it is correct. Although renderings of the principle of charity vary, it dictates that any correct ascription of meanings to a speaker’s words must be supported by both the interpreter and speaker possessing large sets of largely accurate propositional attitudes, including largely true beliefs. The interpreter’s attitudes must be largely consistent with one another; the attitudes ascribed must be largely consistent with one another, as well.[[24]](#endnote-24) So explanations of rational behavior (and the ascriptions involved) must be charitable.

Charity has notable consequences for Evaluative RE as a method. An ascribee’s thoughts and actions cannot intelligibly violate the principle of charity as a corporate body. So these thoughts and actions have to be evaluated by the interpreter to ensure that the attitudes she ascribes are charitable. The thought or action explained must be charitable in light of the attitudes, which themselves have to be largely correct and mutually consistent. The attitudes and contents ascribed must *live up* to the evaluative standard of charity; correctness and consistency are not just “along for the ride,” as the Oslo case makes it seem. Taking individually each case where attitudes explain an action or thought, the correctness looks inessential, even impotent. But individual explanations succeed due in part to the ascribee’s satisfaction of the standards of charitable ascription.[[25]](#endnote-25)

To summarize the description of Evaluative RE so far:

*Evaluative Rational Explanation, Part I*: α) Rational explanation utilizes hedged laws to explain what a subject does/not do and think, and will/not do and think; β) content ascriptions are justified partially by behavioral evidence; γ) content ascriptions are charitable.

Due to (γ), Evaluative RE interpreters presuppose the possession of some propositional attitudes by the ascribee (hence these attitudes’ contents) to explain the possession of other ascribed propositional attitudes (hence their contents). Intentional acts and attitudes are explained with reference to other intentional acts, propositional attitudes, and the contents of these acts and attitudes. The attitudes are themselves ascribed in part *because* they are largely correct and mutually consistent.

The commonsense element of RE—that our attitudes and contents are just evident phenomena—is preserved in the Evaluative version. To know what attitudes would be charitable for her to ascribe, the interpreter must possess the very contents of the attitudes she ascribes.[[26]](#endnote-26) When she ascribes *c*, the interpreter must thus know the application conditions for *c* well enough to possess *c* herself, without some antecedent method for discovering her possession of *c* and other contents.

*Evaluative Rational Explanation, Part II*: δ) ascriptions of *c* are justified partially by ascriptions of contents besides *c*, as they are justified partially by the ascriptions of propositional attitudes with contents besides *c*; ε) *S1* ascribes *c* to *S2* only if *S1* possesses *c*.

Evaluative RE contains a mystery that the Austere version does not. Any Austere RE is “good” just to the extent that it is good empirical science. But it is not as clear what makes Evaluative REs good. The interpreter must know what the standards for a concept’s use to ascribe its possession. How can the interpreter know what the standards—the application conditions—are? Can she just directly perceive them? No. Inference from the behavior of speakers is involved.[[27]](#endnote-27) But if the inference is just a move in empirical theorization, then Evaluative and Austere RE look identical.

Contenthas its home in subjects’ everyday understanding of one another, which helps to dispel the mystery. Actual interpreters ascribe contentson the basis of apparent behavioral facts, not empirical hypothesis testing. Interpreters can also *self-*ascribe. Kripke himself acknowledges that speakers know their meanings (if they do) without testing empirical hypotheses about themselves (1982, 40).[[28]](#endnote-28) If the interpreter possesses *c*, she has some knowledge of the application conditions of *c*, i.e., when it is correct to use *c*. After all, she can ascribe *c* only if she possesses *c*.[[29]](#endnote-29) So interpreters ascribe contents partially on the basis of the contents they possess, which they know themselves to possess in the same “first-personal” way as any speaker. Their ascriptions are justified by this knowledge as well as behavioral evidence.

*4.2 Setting the Stage for Evaluative RE’s Solution*

The skeptic uses the regress to refute anti-skeptical proposals that specify what a speaker means with reference to the speaker’s other contents. The strategy behind the regress is basically expressed by two conditionals. First,if content ascriptions must presuppose that subjects possess contents that are themselves subject to qu-questions, then the skeptical regress obtains. Second, if the skeptical regress obtains, then there is no intentional content.

Here, then, is why the paradox fails if Evaluative RE is true: *the first conditional is* *false*. The ascribee’s contents are susceptible to permutations that cannot be ruled out except via appeal to her contents that could just as easily be called into question. Indeed, the skeptic’s qu-questions are unanswerable without the ascription of other contents themselves open to permutation. Yet, it does not follow that the contents are not there. The skeptic’s qu-hypotheses merely appearto undermine content. The appearance is misleading—the skeptic illicitly begs the question against the methodology.

It is helpful to understand Evaluative RE’s solution as a variation on a famous Carnapian theme. There are

two kinds of questions of existence: first, questions of the existence of certain entities […] *within the framework*; we call them *internal questions*; and second, questions concerning the existence or reality *of the system of entities as a whole*, called *external questions*. (Carnap 1956, 206)

Internal questions make sense, but they cannot call into question the conceptual framework in which they are raised. External questions could—if only they made veridical sense.

As I am appropriating the distinction, however, both sorts of questions make veridical sense. They just call for different sorts of answers. Nor is a “semantic framework” the dividing line. Instead, the line divides those questions that can be answered within a methodology from those that seek answers about the methodology and its domain through extra-methodological means.

Imagine that the skeptic’s question, “Does the speaker mean plus or quus?,” is taken internally. We answer this within the methodology of Evaluative RE. That methodology requires the possession of contents by the interpreter and the ascribee for there to be ascriptions of any particular content. We, as interpreters, can thus utilize behavioral evidence, charity, and our own intentional contents to ascribe intentional states. In fact, many questions internal to the methodology are basically qu-questions: “Which of such-and-such possibilities does the speaker mean?” Since the speaker in the skeptical scenario is an everyday English speaker, the interpretative task is easy. She means plus.

The skeptic *wants* to question the existence of one content at a time, refusing to allow interpreters to default to the contents that the skeptic has not (yet) called into question. Evaluative RE bars this move. It mandates that each qu-question be answered with reference to the contents possessed by the interpreter and ascribee. So the only option left is to cast global doubt on the method. The skeptic must allege something like: “In answering the question, ‘Does the speaker mean plus or quus?,’ it is never specified how the speaker could have the contents Evaluative REs ascribe to her.” Yet, a demand that the anti-skeptic show *exactly* how nonintentional facts realize the speaker’s grasp of plus is just a demand for reduction.[[30]](#endnote-30) There is no need for a reduction to vindicate intentionality (cf. §§3.1, 4.5). Supervenience makes sense of how there could be intentional facts in a world in which intentional contents are not found at the causally basic level.

If RE is evaluative, the skeptic’s question—"How does the speaker mean plus by ‘+’?” —is answerable by dividing it its internal sense (which is easy to answer) from its external sense (which includes an illegitimate demand for reduction).

*4.3 Legitimate Presupposition*

Kripke assumes the anti-skeptic must specify how the speaker’s mind satisfies IPR for “+,” and do so without presupposing the speaker’s possession of other intentional states that would fix, wholly or partially, what the speaker means by ‘+.’ Evaluative RE flatly rejects the assumption. In fact, if it is the right form of RE, then the skeptical regress never even points to a problem in the first place.

According to the regress, any attempt to specify what a speaker meant in the past by appealing to other past contents presupposes that the speaker possessed other contents. That is, it presupposes that other contents satisfy IPR to show that the content in question satisfies IPR. But the skeptic can direct qu-questions at those contents just as easily. Thus, such appeals eternally defer a sufficient reply to any of the skeptic’s qu-questions, failing to show the speaker meant anything. Since the past is relevantly like the present, the speaker means nothing now, either.

Because Evaluative RE has many intuitive points of contact with semantic skepticism, certain anti-skeptical appeals to it are easy to conflate with others, actual or imagined. Here, then, is a semi-formal presentation of the particular anti-skeptical reply I have in mind.

*Evaluative RE 🡪 No Skeptical Regress (i.e., the ‘No Regress Argument’)*

1. If Evaluative RE is correct, then it is necessary that: interpreters ascribe contents (a) while ascribing or presupposing the ascribee’s possession of a plurality of other contents; and, (b) on the basis of the contents interpreters possess.

“Evaluative Rational Explanation, Official,” clauses (δ) and (ε) (§§4.1), explains (a) and (b).

1. If [consequent of (1)], then: if contents exist, contents are only ascribable with the method outlined in (1a) and (1b).[[31]](#endnote-31)
2. If [consequent of (2)], then the inability of the interpreter to answer the skeptic’s quus-hypothesis without using the method outlined in (1a) and (1b) is due to the way contents must be ascribed.
3. If Evaluative RE is correct, then the inability of the interpreter to answer the skeptic’s quus-hypothesis without using the method outlined in (1a) and (1b) is due to the way contents must be ascribed. [1-3]

This is how content ascription works under Evaluative RE.

1. If [consequent of (4)], then the skeptic’s quus-hypothesis cannot be answered without presupposing the existence of other contents about which the skeptic could ask qu-questions.
2. If [consequent of (5)], then the skeptical paradox is consistent with the existence of intentional content.

What Evaluative RE proposes contents are is not consistent with the skeptic’s conclusion. But the paradox fails to eliminate it. It is a well-motivated possibility. “plus or quus?” is unanswerable without presupposing the interpreter and ascribee’s possession of other contents. It is unanswerable in this way precisely because of how content ascription works, *not* because content ascriptions ascribe something that is not really there.

1. If the skeptical paradox is consistent with the existence of intentional content, then the skeptical paradox fails.

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 ∴ If Evaluative RE is correct, then the skeptical paradox fails. [4-7]

If this argument succeeds, and the paradox fails against Austere RE as well, then rational explanation dissolves the paradox, whichever view of rational explanation turns out true.

*4.4 God’s Eye View v. The Best Approximation*

One might object that Evaluative RE cannot answer the paradox—it must be answered from the *God’s Eye View*, which is presuppositionless. Recall that answers to the paradox are not limited to what the speaker can know about the world her meaning, or by what an average, limited interpreter could know about them. Yet, from the God’s Eye View, interpreters would not have to presuppose *anything*.

Recall too, however, that the paradox is answered from *our best approximation* of the God’s Eye View, not the View itself. The View imparts omniscience. It leaves no room for debate about any proposition, including, “There is content.” Our best approximation of the View, however, includes the betterment of the process we of necessity use to ascribe contents. By assumption, the process is correctly described by either Austere RE or Evaluative RE. On the Evaluative RE lemma, we “idealize” RE by imagining that the interpreter has access to every fact about the ascribee, every fact about herself, etc. But the methodology still has properties (δ) and (ε) from Part II of the official statement of Evaluative RE, which fuel the No Regress Argument.

*4.5 Must Content Be Reduced to the Nonintentional?*

Perhaps Evaluative RE is illegitimate precisely because the paradox shows that the method cannot justify content ascriptions.

*Objection: Evaluative RE Begs the Question against the Regress*

1. Evaluative RE is the correct view of RE only if ascriptions made according to Evaluative RE are justified.
2. Ascriptions made according to Evaluative RE are justified only if the interpreter can answer the skeptic’s qu-hypotheses about the ascribed contents without presupposing the possession of other contents (by the interpreter or the ascribee).
3. The interpreter cannot answer the skeptic’s qu-hypotheses about the ascribed contents without presupposing the possession of other contents (by the interpreter or the ascribee).
4. Evaluative RE is not the correct view of RE. [1-3]
5. If Evaluative RE is not the correct view of RE, then the No Regress Argument fails.

∴ The No Regress Argument fails. [4-5]

 The objection is unsound because Premise 2 is false.

To elaborate: In motivating premise 2, the skeptic might insist that an interpreter *must* ascribe contents without presupposing the existence of other contents. That is what reductive explanation does. Maybe one can in principle describe with nonintentional concepts any nonintentional facts in virtue of which the ascribee possesses plus. The concepts will probably be from neuroscience or something more basic. Kripke lets anti-skeptics appeal to any nonintentional fact. So either the anti-skeptic can reductively describe the speaker’s grasp, or the speaker means nothing.

There are two replies. First, leaving the specifics of Evaluative RE aside, the objection reduces the paradox to the somewhat banal point that philosophers do not yet know how to sew intentional content into the causally basic fabric of the universe. The skeptic is basically alleging, “If you, the philosopher, cannot reduce content possession to more ontologically-kosher stuff, then content remains unvindicated.” If we respond to qu-questions without presupposing that the speaker possesses other determinate contents, it shows that we do not yet have a nonintentional description of the speaker that entails that she means plus. Even so, if the regress’s challenge amounts to no more than this, then Kripke is just advancing a determinacy requirement that any attempt to reduce the speaker’s intentional states would have to satisfy. It gives no reason that reduction *must* fail (cf. Hattiangadi 2007, 180-208).

Secondly, Evaluative RE simply is not reductive, and the paradox gives no reason it has to be. Evaluative RE explains thought and behavior through content ascription. It does not specify in nonintentional terms what intentional content amounts to. Like Austere RE, Evaluative RE only requires that intentional facts supervene on the causally basic level of reality.[[32]](#endnote-32) But if RE is Evaluative, intentional contents are not (just) theoretical posits required for etiology; they are evident features of cognition.

*4.6 First-Personal (Dis)satisfaction*

 Evaluative RE’s solution shares a feature with many refutations of skeptical arguments: it does not offer a straightforward answer to the straightforward questions that make the skepticism gripping in the first place.

This feature may, however, be fatal, not merely notable. It may imply that the solution never shows how speakers, as *ascribees*, meet the Justification Condition (JC) (§§1.1). Kripke often emphasizes that the paradox fascinates precisely because one’s normal, estimable confidence in what one means is revealed, upon *one’s own* inspection of one’s mental states and recalled behavior, to be groundless.

[T]he sceptical doubt […] is presented from the inside. […] Wittgenstein’s challenge can be presented to me as a question about *myself*: was there some fact about me – what I meant by plus – that mandates what I should do now? (1982, 15)

Sometimes when I have contemplated [the paradox], I have something of an eerie feeling. Even now as I write, I feel confident that […] the meaning I attach to the ‘plus’ sign […] *instructs* what I ought to do in all future cases. […] But when I concentrate on what is now in my mind, what instructions can be found there? […] The infinitely many cases of the [addition] table are not in my mind for my future self to consult. (ibid., 21-2)

Evaluative RE does not explain *what about* the speaker’s access to her own meaning justifies her in answering “125,” not “5,” or her prospective answers in the infinitely many other application conditions she has not encountered. Given Evaluative RE, the speaker, as a self-interpreter, can give answers that presuppose she grasps count, etc. Other interpreters can presuppose the same about the speaker when ascribing a grasp of plus to her. But the speaker has nothing that tells her how to use ‘count’ in all cases. The skeptical reaper will come for ‘count’, too, and any other content she musters.

Even if *permitted* the presupposition of contents for ascription, Evaluative RE fares no better. The interpreter would have to specify how the speaker’s grasp, of “+” or any of the other contents presupposed for “+” ascription, “tells” her what she “ought to do” (ibid., 24), “instructs” her uses (ibid., 22), or entails those uses are not executed “blindly” (ibid., 17, 87) in the infinitely many hitherto-unencountered application conditions. The speaker must have *something* that provides her sufficient justification for those uses that is available from her first-person perspective. All the contents involved in the ascription would have to satisfy JC, but Evaluative RE involves no explanation of how *any* content does so. The paradox, it seems, does not succumb to Evaluative RE—it destroys it.

The worry seems fatal if one ignores Evaluative RE’s consequences for the nature of intentional states. Rational explanation, though not nearly perfect, is very successful in explaining thought and behavior. So, on this lemma, where RE is Evaluative, rational explanation enjoys that success. That it is successful does not directly entail that its content ascriptions are literally true. Nevertheless, the success has anti-skeptical consequences. Interpretations require ascribees to have intentional states that render their use of expressions competent and warranted by their circumstances. Interpreters can fail by ignoring as much. Evaluative RE thus accepts that speakers’ words have meaning only if their applications are justified; that is a natural consequence of the theory. An ascribee who makes marks randomly would not qualify as meaning anything by them, even if she intended to. And the justified ascribee is aware of much of what justifies her, in varying extent and detail.

Does Evaluative RE give a reason to think speakers must have something, first-personally accessible, that can guide them in any hitherto-unencountered application condition? No. In fact, the method’s success shows that they require some degree of justification, though nothing *that* demanding.[[33]](#endnote-33) The success, then, provides good reason to think the proper justification condition is one ascribees meet all the time.

The skeptic is free to argue that Evaluative RE is wrong that speakers need only meet weaker standards for justification. But neither the skeptic nor Kripke *argue* that the justification must amount to first-personally accessible guidance about how to apply ‘+’ in all application conditions. When the skeptic shows an anti-skeptical proposal fails to meet that standard, he concludes the proposal violates JC. And Kripke confesses at one point that when he finds nothing “instruct[ing]” him about what to do in all cases with ‘+’, “[i]t seems that the entire idea of meaning vanishes into thin air” (ibid., 22). Kripke must think such a strong justification requirement on grasps is self-evident (if he really thinks it is genuinely required), since he never argues for it.[[34]](#endnote-34)

Given Evaluative RE’s success, not only is such a requirement not self-evident; it is not even correct. The method’s “idea” of content does not “vanish into thin air” when ascribed to speakers without that degree of justification. It is more or less the idea of what we ascribe every day. So speakers are justified well enough to mean things.[[35]](#endnote-35)

*5. Conclusion*

While Kripke’s Wittgensteinian paradox of rule-following deserves a response, we are under no obligation to accept all of its terms and conditions. The most direct way to reply to it—and the one Kripke demands—is to give a specification of each of the speaker’s intentional contents that answers all of the qu-questions about each of them, without waiting for empirical input or presupposing anything intentional. But anyone familiar with the pursuit of that prize knows it calls for near-mythical analytical heroism. (If Evaluative RE is right, it is mythical, period.) Better to use what we mortals think we know about contents to repel skeptical challenges, if the knowledge is up to the task.

I have argued that the knowledge is indeed up to it. We know quite a bit about how we use intentional contents to explain and assess behavior. If Austere RE is correct, contents do not have to meet the paradox’s supposedly necessary conditions for their existence. If Evaluative RE is correct, legitimate content attribution defuses the skeptical regress and need not meet the strongest demands upon justification of use. Either way, the paradox founders.

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1. The paradox in *WRPL* is a presentation of “Wittgenstein’s argument as it struck Kripke,” so it should not be understood to express Kripke’s non-exegetical views (ibid., 5). This paper does not assess *WRPL* as Wittgenstein exegesis. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. See note 10 regarding other options. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. “+” might be a meaningful non-referring expression. But, following Kripke, I accept ‘“+’ means plus” and “‘+” refers to the addition function” as equivalent, assuming that the latter is intelligible even if “+” is a meaningful nonreferring expression or there are no mathematical abstracta. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Perhaps the primary interpretative controversy about the paradox centers around what *sort* of justification JC requires. According to the classical interpretation, a “justified” use may just be one that is right/correct in light of what the speaker means (cf. Boghossian 1989). The newer rival claims that a “justified” use is one that the speaker’s grasp, as a representation *dictating* the correct uses, must *guide* (cf. Kusch 2006; Bridges 2014). (For an attempt to plumb the textual evidence, see Green 2014, 68-90.]) Since this paper’s solution works under either interpretation of “justification,” my rendering of JC is neutral. The official presentation of the paradox remains neutral on this interpretative question, as well (which explains why it is less detailed than some other renderings).

The newer rival may object that the solution on one lemma cannot satisfy JC, given how that interpretation understands the condition. I address this below (§§4.6). [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. I assume, as Kripke seems to, that the *speaker* being justified in her uses is equivalent to her *uses* being justified. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Some authors have rejected this feature of meaning and content. (For an anti-skeptical solution that embraces “meaning finitism,” see Bloor 1997, 58-73.) They may be right, and Kripke probably only needs words to have a finite-yet-very large number of application conditions to give the skeptical doubts purchase. In any case, my solution need not question infinitary projection; if the paradox fails to annihilate meaning even when granted this stringent necessary condition, it will fail with less stringent cousins. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. One anti-skeptical approach makes no such appeal: the dispositionalist proposal (cf. Kripke 1982, 23-37). It may attempt to reduce all grasps to the speaker’s dispositions for use. Kripke’s main objection to this proposal is straightforward (in form)—that I am disposed to *ϕ* does not give me any reason or obligation to *ϕ* (ibid., 37). The proposal fails *prima facie* to specify a justificatory state. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Some might think genuine rational explanation does not *essentially* involve propositional attitudes (e.g., Thompson 2008). For example, rational creatures may have essential *teloi* that explain what they do and think. Content-ascribing rational explanation may be translatable into these views’ preferred idiom. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Some might argue that RE’s generalizations are not real laws, which is not relevant to the paradox. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. One might wonder whether Austere and Evaluative RE are the only two possible views. They are not. Certain other options have been defended in the past, e.g.., some 20th-century views inspired by Wittgenstein’s later writings that took rational explanation to be acausal. I am assuming that RE, Austere or Evaluative, is causal. The two approaches are the ones with significant contemporary favor. Hence my dilemma for the paradox does not exhaust logical space—only the space ofplausibility. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Defenses of the merely causal approach to RE include Henderson (2010), Fodor (1974, 1997) (who never declares RE merely causal, but defends it as such), and Schroeder (2003). Dissidents include Bridges (2011), Haugeland (1998), Hieronymi (2011), McDowell (1996, 66-86; 1998, 25-340), and Millar (2004). [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Although some understand “evaluative” normativity as importantly distinct from the “prescriptive” sort, I choose “Evaluative” RE. This form of RE involves the interpreter’s evaluation of ascribees and their behavior; this is not to say that Evaluative RE does not deal in prescriptions. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Usually, those who like Austere RE call rational explanation, “folk psychology.” [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. In fact, a subject is sometimes more likely to act *ir*rationally than rationally. Cognitive science reveals many cases where experimental subjects are more likely to reach an incorrect conclusion, even though they have everything needed to reach the right one. *Ceteris* *paribus* clauses in Austere RE might exclude conditions of unusually high *rationality*. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. There is controversy about why (and whether) simplicity is virtuous. Sober (2015) provides a nice treatment. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Only one *competing* explanation, technically. Lower- and higher-level sciences could offer different true explanations of the same phenomenon.

Also, adequacy is not really “all or nothing.” Even the best theories at a given time may not be perfectly adequate. They are often less adequate than clearly worse competitors that achieve perfect adequacy through *ad hoc* adjustments.

I leave aside these (and other) qualifications to this rough-and-ready sketch. They do not affect Austere RE’s anti-skeptical consequences. (Thanks to Joyce C. Havstad for spurring these qualifications.) [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Gibbard (2012) defends an anti-skeptical solution that appeals to the relative simplicity of the plus- over the quus-hypothesis. Feldman (1986) suggests something similar. Neither answer relies on the purely *empirical* nature of content posits. Ludlow pursues simplicity as an answer to the paradox as adapted to Chomskyan grammar-processing rules, but does not provide a general anti-skeptical solution (2011, 105-117). [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. If false, a subject could possess intrinsically contentful categorical states even if not at all disposed to think or act in ways characteristic of possessing them. This would be a return to the picture of content states as “mental mirrors” composed of intrinsically representational stuff. (See Rorty 1979 for the metaphor.) Although the picture has its defenders (e.g. Searle 1980), suffice it to say: its truth would be surprising. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. This is not intended to exclude a stronger grounding relation with the nonintentional. Admittedly, supervenience may be the strongest plausible relation if Evaluative RE is right (cf. §§4.5). [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. I am indebted to Soames (1998) and Van Cleve (1992) for the inspiration to rely on supervenience here.

Van Cleve thinks the paradox inveighs against the possibility of intentional supervenience on the nonintentional. But his interpretation is tendentious (Green 2014, 76-89). [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Assume that we do not have to say *exactly what* it is about the speaker and her environment that add up to intentional states. Why not just then say straight off that the paradox never touches a merely supervenient conception of content, no digression into RE necessary?

That might be *ad hoc*. Appeals to supervenience can “save” faux entities. Take concrete entity type *E*. *E*-entities seem to exist, though they do not. Assume that it is unclear how causally basic stuff “adds up” to *E*-entities. But we do know that if there are *E*-entities, no two worlds identical in facts about causally basic reality differ in facts about *E*-entities. So we can sit satisfied that *E*-entities supervene on the causally basic without explaining how. We would be misled—by stipulation, there are no *E*-entities.

Rather, *E*-entities need to *do* something, to *explain* something, to merit confidence. Intentional content explains quite a bit, whatever its eccentricities. That is one reason why the paradox is “absolutely wild” (Kripke 1982, 9). Even if no one comes to believe in intentional contents through empirical confirmation, these contents evidently explain so much behavior. The paradox abnegates something with such evident explanatory power. So the thought that intentional contents supervene on the nonintentional is well-motivated. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. If applying “ought” to evaluative normativity seems odd, see note 12. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Evaluative RE might look very similar to Davidsonian interpretation. (See Davidson 2001a, 123-79; Lepore and Ludwig 2005, 147-300). Evaluative RE uses charity basically as Davidson understands it. For a paragon evaluative theory of RE, see Schueler (2009).

Davidson may not have held that RE is essentially evaluative. Lepore and Ludwig (2005) and Schroeder (2003) deny he did. Others disagree (e.g., Fennell 2015). To the extent that he did not, he would endorse Austere RE. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. The rationale for the principle is well-known, and the varied readings do not affect Evaluative RE’s approach to the paradox. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Charity *can* play a role in Austere RE. It could be an inductively justified heuristic. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. This does not imply that the interpreter can only ascribe contents that she possessed before beginning the interpretation. Interpreters can obtain contents while interpreting. They may realize that they do not possess a content that “maps on” well to what an ascribee likely grasps, but eventually come to possess (thence ascribe) that content. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. I am discussing ascriptions’ justification here, not etiology. Clearly, we usually just understand what others are saying without any occurrent inferences when we share fluency. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Empirical knowledge certainly informs our knowledge of what the application conditions of particular contents are, and thus when they are properly ascribed. (The extensions of natural-kind concepts are probably discernible only *a posteriori*.) The point, rather, is that Evaluative RE content ascription involves an irreducibly nonempirical element. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. One might have a “shaky grasp” of a content and still be able to ascribe it to others. Remember, however, that the ascriptions that overcome the skeptic are made from the God’s Eye View (cf. §§1.1, 4.4). I am not relying on the everyday cogency of the interpreter’s contents to herself as a direct answer to the paradox. (I thank Raff Donelson for pressing me on this.) [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. The “global doubt” can take one other form, depending on one’s interpretation of the paradox (cf. §§4.6). [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. For content, existence is possession (Platonism notwithstanding). [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. This is not an empty appeal to supervenience to save something that does not exist. (See note 21.) Austere RE incurred the risk that the appeal to supervenience covered for some shortcoming in the causal explanation of behavior. This risk had to be dispelled. But the appeal to supervenience in Evaluative RE’s case is not “covering for” an explanatory shortcoming. It explains how intentionality, an evident feature of cognition, coexists with causally basic properties. So there is nothing *ad hoc* about supplementing Evaluative RE with an appeal to supervenience. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. Davidson argues, from the perspective of radical interpretation, that justified, meaningful uses of expressions rarely issue from consciously accessible rules that speakers consult (2001b, 113-5). [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. For a diagnosis Kripke’s confidence (assuming he really thinks JC mandates such strong justification), see Bridges 2014. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. I argue elsewhere, without reference to Evaluative RE, that the paradox is uncompelling if “justification” in JC is equivalent to a requirement for the strong form of justification just addressed (Green 2018, 115-8). My thanks to an anonymous reviewer for persuading me that more was needed to address the skeptic’s possible demand for such guidance. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)