

*Routledge Studies in Twentieth-Century Philosophy*

# **ENGAGING KRIPKE WITH WITTGENSTEIN**

**THE STANDARD METER,  
CONTINGENT APRIORI, AND BEYOND**

Edited by  
Martin Gustafsson, Oskari Kuusela, and  
Jakub Mácha



“This volume re-shapes the conversation regarding the intricate connections between Wittgenstein’s and Kripke’s work. It is, without a doubt, a must-have for any scholar working in either the Analytical tradition or Wittgensteinian philosophy.”

**Juan J. Colomina-Almiñana**, *Louisiana State University, USA*

“At important points in his work, Kripke was in dialogue with the thought of Wittgenstein. The editors have assembled an impressive team of international Wittgenstein scholars with a deep knowledge of the analytic tradition to expand and explore this dialogue, re-examining the relationship between the work of two philosophers, providing fresh insights, and revealing tensions between Kripke’s interpretation of Wittgenstein on rule-following and his own views about meaning. The focus is on names, modality and the meter-rod, but the issues raised touch on some of the deepest questions in the philosophy of language: the connection between meaning and practice, the nature of the a priori, transcendental realism versus transcendental idealism, and the aims and methods of philosophy. This volume must be a starting point for all future discussions of these issues.”

**Marie McGinn**, *University of York, UK*

“Wittgenstein and Kripke are in certain important respects very similar and in others very different philosophers. This inspired volume explores these comparisons along multiple interesting dimensions.”

**Paul Boghossian**, *New York University, USA*



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# Engaging Kripke with Wittgenstein

This volume draws connections between Wittgenstein's philosophy and the work of Saul Kripke, especially his *Naming and Necessity*.

Saul Kripke is regarded as one of the foremost representatives of contemporary analytic philosophy. His most important contributions include the strict distinction between metaphysical and epistemological questions, the introduction of the notions of contingent a priori truth and necessary a posteriori truth, and original accounts of names, descriptions, identity, necessity, and realism. The chapters in this book elucidate the relevant connections between Kripke's work and Wittgenstein, specifically concerning the standard meter, contingent apriori, and rule-following. The contributions shed light on how Kripke's philosophical outlook was influenced by Wittgenstein, and how mainstream analytic philosophy and Wittgensteinian philosophy can fruitfully engage with one another.

*Engaging Kripke with Wittgenstein* will be of interest to philosophers working on Wittgenstein, Kripke, and the history of analytic philosophy.

**Martin Gustafsson** is Professor of Philosophy at Åbo Akademi University, Finland. He is working mainly within the philosophy of language, philosophy of action, and the history of analytic philosophy. He has published papers on the philosophy of Elizabeth Anscombe, J. L. Austin, Stanley Cavell, Donald Davidson, Gottlob Frege, Ian Hacking, W. V. O. Quine, Gilbert Ryle, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and others.

**Oskari Kuusela** is Associate Professor in philosophy at the University of East Anglia. His main philosophical interests relate to philosophical methodology, the history of analytic philosophy, and ethics. His monographs include *The Struggle Against Dogmatism* (2008) and *Wittgenstein on Logic as the Method of Philosophy* (2019). He is also the co-editor of several edited collections on Wittgenstein, including *The Oxford Handbook of Wittgenstein* (2011).

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*Edited by Martin Gustafsson, Oskari Kuusela, and Jakub Mácha*

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# Engaging Kripke with Wittgenstein

The Standard Meter, Contingent Apriori,  
and Beyond

Edited by Martin Gustafsson,  
Oskari Kuusela, and Jakub Mácha

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Dedicated to the memory of Saul Kripke



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# Abbreviations

- NN Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*  
PI Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*  
TLP Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*  
WRPL Saul Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*

# Contributors

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# Introduction

*Martin Gustafsson, Oskari Kuusela,  
and Jakub Mácha*

The aim of this volume is to deepen our understanding of the relationship between two of the most important thinkers in the tradition of analytic philosophy: Saul Kripke and Ludwig Wittgenstein. During the last five decades, Kripke was arguably *the* most influential analytic philosopher. His name is associated with ideas that set much of the agenda of contemporary analytic metaphysics, philosophy of language, and philosophy of logic: a strict distinction between metaphysical and epistemological questions, the introduction of the notions of contingent a priori truth and necessary a posteriori truth, the replacement of Fregean, Russellian and Searlean/Strawsonian accounts of names with an account of names as rigid designators, the causal or historical-chain theory of reference, an externalist conception of meaning, and the employment of the notion of possible worlds as a way to elucidate the concept of necessity. Wittgenstein's influence is well known; it reaches all the way back to the publication of his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* in 1922, while his strongest postwar influence stems from what is known as his later philosophy, most prominently articulated in the *Philosophical Investigations* from 1953.

Kripke and Wittgenstein are sometimes presented as polar opposites on the planet of analytic philosophy. On the one hand, Wittgenstein-influenced commentators have depicted Kripke as an extreme advocate of the “Augustinian” picture of language which Wittgenstein aims to undermine in the *Investigations*. On the other hand, Kripke-influenced thinkers have presented Wittgenstein's philosophy as mired in a quasi-verificationist and meaning-is-use form of anti-metaphysics that belongs to the youthful past of analytic philosophy. However, a careful reading of both philosophers reveals a more complex picture. Many of Wittgenstein's direct targets, including Frege, Russell, and the logical positivists, are Kripke's targets too. It is also notable that in his criticism of these thinkers, Kripke sometimes makes use of examples taken from Wittgenstein, such as the Moses example in PI, §79. Moreover, as Panu Raatikainen argues in this volume, readings of Kripke as a devoted “Augustinian” are problematic,

if not outright wrong. Questions can also be raised about whether the Wittgensteinian critics have exaggerated Kripke's commitment to extreme natural kind essentialism, and whether they have paid enough attention to Kripke's emphasis on several occasions that he is not putting forward a full theory but a picture. Interestingly, the latter leaves more room for exceptions and reservations than a full philosophical theory would do, not altogether differently from Wittgensteinian clarificatory models or pictures (cf. PI, §§130–131). In accordance with these points, even if there is much disagreement between the contributors to this volume, they agree that the relation between Kripke and Wittgenstein is much more intricate and interesting than some black-and-white caricatures suggest, and that we need to explore this relation in depth in order to get clearer about what analytic philosophy is and should (aim to) be today.

Kripke's best known and most extensive engagement with Wittgenstein's work is in his 1982 *tour de force*, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*. This book was the main impetus for the vast discussion on linguistic rules and normativity in the 1980s and 1990s, an important theme of which was also whether, and if so how, Kripke had misread Wittgenstein. Later on Kripke's discussion of Wittgenstein on rule-following has had significant influence on analytic philosophy of language, quite independent of any concerns relating to Wittgenstein exegesis or work on the philosophy of language inspired by Wittgenstein. The emphasis of the present volume lies elsewhere, however. Although several contributors bring up the issue of rule-following, the book's main focus is on themes explored by Kripke in *Naming and Necessity* and in his shorter articles on logic, metaphysics, and semantics. All of Kripke's previously mentioned contributions to contemporary philosophy are discussed, and their relations to Wittgenstein's thought are discussed in detail.

In this vein, several chapters focus on Wittgenstein's example of the Standard Meter in remark 50 of the *Investigations* with which Kripke takes issue in *Naming and Necessity* when introducing the notion of the contingent a priori that brings into question the traditional philosophical association of a priority and necessity. This is a point where Kripke explicitly disagrees with Wittgenstein who maintains that one cannot either ascribe or deny the Standard Meter the property of having the length of one meter insofar as it plays the logical role of a mode of representation rather than object of measurement. Evidently, the two philosophers use the Standard Meter example to make quite different points: Kripke a point about the difference between reference-fixing and giving meaning, and Wittgenstein a point regarding the idea of logically simple elements such as Russell and he himself postulated in the *Tractatus*. Several contributors to this volume tackle this cluster of problems in different ways, with some of them perceiving more agreement than disagreement between the two philosophers,

while others aim to bring to light inherent differences and even incompatibilities between Wittgenstein and Kripke.

Consensus has not been an aim of the volume. As already mentioned, the contributors differ much in their interpretations and evaluations of Kripke's and Wittgenstein's thought. Some argue that there are deep differences and incompatibilities between the two, and take a stand on who is right and who is wrong. Others adopt a more conciliatory approach, arguing that the differences between Wittgenstein and Kripke have been exaggerated. Genuinely novel perspectives and analyses are provided, resulting in a fuller picture of the Kripke–Wittgenstein relation than the one given by the extensive yet somewhat one-sided discussion of the issue of rule-following. As editors, we hope, before all, that the different interpretations and views offered will stimulate further discussion regarding the significance of Kripke and Wittgenstein for philosophy today.<sup>1</sup>

To briefly outline the contributions to this volume, Panu Raatikainen starts the volume with a discussion of the relationship between Wittgenstein's and Kripke's accounts of reference, ostensive definition, essentialism, the necessary a posteriori, and their attitudes towards philosophical theories. Raatikainen argues that the followers of both Kripke and Wittgenstein have exaggerated the differences between the two philosophers which are not nearly as great as they have seemed to many. Thus, for example, Kripke's account of reference is not an instance of the "Augustinian" picture of meaning criticized by Wittgenstein or subject to Wittgenstein's criticisms of naïve accounts of ostensive definition. Neither is Wittgenstein a semantic internalist, contrary to what some of his followers have suggested, and he seems to have no need to reject the notion of necessary a posteriori. As Raatikainen puts it, on several occasions, Kripke and Wittgenstein "pull to the same direction".

This is followed by Sebastian Sunday Grève, who, similarly detecting more agreement than disagreement, discusses Frege's, Russell's, Kripke's, and Wittgenstein's accounts of names, explaining how insights from the latter two philosophers help to resolve problems that arise for the former two. Here an important issue, emphasized by Kripke and Wittgenstein alike, is the independence of the referring function of names from descriptions, with Sunday Grève emphasizing that while Russell is committed to what is known as the description theory of names in the case of ordinary names (although not in the case of logically proper names), Frege is not. Sunday Grève's overall conclusion is that there is much more accord between Kripke's and Wittgenstein's accounts of names than has been usually recognized, with both rejecting the description theory and recognizing the character of names as rigid designators (to put the point in Kripke's terms). Indeed, Sunday Grève suggests that, despite Kripke's reservations, rigid designation ought to be considered as a general criterion for being a name, although

identifying which expressions really are names is complicated by the phenomenon of family-resemblance. He also maintains that Kripke's historical chain account of the determination of reference is consistent with what Kripke and Wittgenstein say about rule-following in the broad sense that both reference-fixing and rule-following involve communal practices.

The consistency of Kripke's interpretation of rule-following with his account of the determination of reference is questioned by Alexander Miller, who discusses the relationship between Kripke's account of reference-fixing in *Naming and Necessity* and his skeptical argument in *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, according to which there are no matters of fact capable of determining reference. Despite certain suggestions to the contrary, according to Miller, an unresolved conflict remains between Kripke's accounts of language in the two works, due to how his skeptical considerations regarding a dispositional account of rule-following apply to his own causal-historical picture of the determination of reference too. As Miller argues, the situation here is crucially different from a similar looking one in ethics where an apparent conflict between non-cognitivism in meta-ethics and cognitivism in normative ethics is resolvable. By contrast, the conflict between what Kripke says in the two works cannot be solved by limiting the skepticism about dispositional accounts to semantic meta-level and the causal-historical account to first-order semantics.

Sanford Shieh's chapter discusses certain similarities and differences between Wittgenstein's early account of modality and its place in philosophy, and Kripke's account of modality. Shieh argues that although Wittgenstein's early work can be seen as bringing the concepts of necessity and possibility back into the heart of logic from their banishment by Frege and Russell, and something similar can be said of Kripke in response to Quine's criticisms of Carnap, the views of the two philosophers differ with regard to the basis of the concern of philosophy and/or logic with modality. As Shieh explains by examining the development of Wittgenstein's early philosophy and the problems to which he is responding, for Wittgenstein, the ground for judging the correctness of an account of logical possibility and necessity is being able to articulate a coherent account of propositions and of logic. For Kripke, by contrast, a correct account of modality is something that satisfies our intuitions about relevant matters. Shieh then further argues that Wittgenstein's account enables him to avoid certain problems regarding the conflicts of intuitions that arise for Kripke.

In his contribution, Alexandre N. Machado presents the main tenets of Kripke's theory of contingent a priori which constitute the basis for Kripke's disagreement with Wittgenstein, who denies that the Standard Meter can be either ascribed or denied the length of one meter. Machado stresses that Kripke's theory is at odds with our normal practices of measuring, arguing that Wittgenstein's claim is based on two premises. First, every object

that has a length in the metric system is comparable to the Standard Meter. Second, it is not possible to compare the Standard Meter to itself. Machado then further argues that the Standard Meter must not be conceived as an abstract entity, as well as seeking to avert the objection that Wittgenstein's argument is based on the confusion between metaphysical and epistemological questions. Machado concludes by addressing the objection that his interpretation is based on a substantial conception of nonsense criticized by the representatives of (what is known as) the resolute reading of Wittgenstein's early work.

Continuing the discussion on the Standard Meter, Jakub Mácha argues that Kripke's apparent disagreement with Wittgenstein's claims about the Standard Meter arises from two different ways of fixing reference. Kripke proposes that "meter" rigidly refers to the length that the Standard Meter has at time  $t_0$ , whereby this length is an abstract object postulated by the theory of absolute space. Wittgenstein, in contrast, seems to presuppose that "meter" rigidly refers to the Standard Meter. Mácha points out that both ways of fixing reference have their mutual advantages and disadvantages. A difference between Wittgenstein and Kripke is that Wittgenstein's way of fixing reference entails that statements attributing to the Standard Meter a definite length in meters are without truth-value, while for Kripke such attributions are contingently true or false. A truth-value gap however reappears in Kripke's modal theoretical framework in the context of which existential and modal claims about basic particulars are without truth-value. Mácha concludes that both Wittgenstein and Kripke cannot but allow for certain truth-value gaps which constitute instances of para-complete reasoning.

Christian Helmut Wenzel begins his contribution with a discussion of Kripke's readings of Wittgenstein and Kant in *Naming and Necessity*, whereby he points out what he takes to be misunderstandings concerning the two authors. Next, Wenzel turns to Kripke's example of the Standard Meter and the way he uses it to separate metaphysics from epistemology. Kripke claims, in opposition to what he takes to be the tradition since Kant, that there are contingent truths that can be known a priori, with necessity and the a priori thus coming apart. In response, Wenzel argues that Kripke's own account seems to be consistent, provided one is willing to accept his interpretation of the "a priori", although Wenzel also admits that there are hidden assumptions here and certain doubts remain. He concludes that Kripke's interpretation of the notion of a priori is significantly different from what Kant meant by the term "a priori".

Further engaging with the example of the Standard Meter, Oskari Kuusela argues that Kripke's introduction of the epistemological-metaphysical category of contingent a priori fails due to its reliance on an unrecognized wavering between different uses of the sentence "Stick  $S$  is one meter long

at time  $t_0$ ”. While the sentence can be used either in the logical role of a contingent true/false proposition or that of an a priori statement, there seems to be no way of using it so that it performs both logical roles at once. In any case, no such cases seem to emerge from the examination of different interpretations of how Kripke might have intended the sentence to express something that is both contingent and a priori. Here Kripke’s failure to explicitly distinguish between the contingency of arbitrary stipulations that are not true/false and the contingency of contingent true/false propositions partly appears to add to the confusion. If Kuusela is right, the notion of contingent a priori is merely a metaphysical mirage arising from logical unclarity, even though it is certainly a philosophically enlightening case to contemplate. Kuusela concludes by proposing a different Wittgenstein-inspired account of the logical status or definitional sentences in terms of their non-temporal use that, he argues, does not suffer from the problems with Kripke’s account and which seems also able to resolve the problems raised for Kripke’s account by Keith Donnellan and Nathan Salmón.

In her contribution “How Long Is the Standard Meter in Paris?”<sup>2</sup> Cora Diamond connects Kripke’s *Naming and Necessity* discussion of the Standard Meter with his treatment of rule-following in *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*. Diamond makes the connection via a central thematic in Wittgenstein’s own writings and lectures, namely, his frequent analogies between describing, measuring, and rule-following. Diamond rejects verificationist interpretations of Wittgenstein’s Standard Meter paragraph (in particular, the interpretation she finds in Norman Malcolm’s attempted defense of Wittgenstein against Kripke). Instead, she argues that Kripke fails to recognize a difference Wittgenstein explores in his distinction between transitive and non-transitive uses of words—namely, the difference between a genuine comparison and a non-comparison represented as a comparison. According to Diamond’s Wittgenstein, to say of the Standard Meter in Paris that it is one meter long is analogous to trying to show how tall one is by putting one’s hand on one’s head. Developing this point in connection with Wittgenstein’s discussion of samples, calculations and proofs, Diamond identifies the connection between measures and rules which constitutes the link between Kripke’s two books. At the end of her paper, she explains how her account of Wittgenstein’s viewpoint can help us understand Putnam’s criticism of Kripke, and the contrast Putnam makes between appeal to sortal identity and appeal to the absolute notion of identity with which Kripke is working.

Martin Gustafsson further explores the Standard Meter example by developing a diagnosis originally proposed by Cora Diamond (2001), namely, that Kripke’s treatment of the example involves a wavering between what Wittgenstein calls “transitive” and “intransitive” uses of words. Such wavering makes it appear as if a genuine comparison is being made even

if it isn't, as in the case where someone puts her hand on her head to prove that she knows how tall she is (cf. PI, §279). According to Gustafsson's reading, Kripke's insisting that the Standard Meter is one meter long involves a similar conflation. Gustafsson argues that such wavering makes it impossible for Kripke to adequately account for the most basic feature of measuring *qua* practice, namely, its being a matter of repeated comparisons. Gustafsson goes on by relating the disagreement between Kripke and Wittgenstein to the actual development, function and use of increasingly sophisticated and precise standards within the metric system, asking to what extent Wittgenstein's viewpoint can avoid simpleminded forms of conventionalism and pragmatism and do justice to the notion of metrological progress. According to Gustafsson, it is one of the central lessons of Diamond's reading of Wittgenstein that he can not only allow for such a notion of progress but help us see why a Kripkean approach fails in this regard.

Avner Baz's chapter is a response to what he describes as a dominance of transcendental realism in contemporary analytic philosophy. Starting from the disagreement between Kripke and Wittgenstein concerning the sense that it would (or would not) make to say of the Standard Meter that it is, or is not, one meter long, he seeks to make the case for a form of transcendental idealism, according to which our objective representations of the world—our true or false “cognitions”—have “transcendental” sense conditions. It therefore makes no sense to suppose that the world as reflected in those representations is given entirely independently from those conditions, contrary to what transcendental realists seem to assume. This much remains true, Baz argues, even after we follow Wittgenstein, and recognize, *pace* Kant, that our sense-making practices are varied, complex, and plastic, and that these practices and their sense-conditions evolve historically. This, Baz holds, calls us to replace thinking about what the sense-conditions of our sense-making practices *must* be with “looking and seeing” what, in some given case and some moment in time, those conditions, or some of them, are (cf. PI, §§66, 93, 578).

In the final chapter, Rupert Read discusses Kripke from the point of view of his recent liberatory reading of Wittgenstein, comparing the views of Socrates, the Stoics, and the Ancient skeptics with Wittgenstein on the one hand, and with Kripke's meaning skepticism in *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* on the other hand. Read argues that, unlike the notion of freedom that Wittgenstein articulates, Kripke's interpretation of Wittgenstein's discussion of rule-following in terms of meaning skepticism implies a notion of freedom as mere unconstraintness or licentiousness which ultimately only amounts to a fantasy of freedom. In this connection the Ancient skeptics can be seen as an intellectual backdrop to the notion of liberatory philosophy that Read ascribes to Wittgenstein, and which,

among other things, aims also to liberate us from the illusion of “‘total’ freedom” that Kripke’s meaning skepticism implies. Ultimately the notion of freedom Read finds in Kripke cannot even be expressed, and it amounts to nothing at all, according to him.

### Notes

- 1 It was not part of our original plan to produce a volume with only male contributors, besides the previously published essay by Cora Diamond. We regretfully admit defeat to circumstances in this regard.
- 2 Previously published in T. McCarthy and S. C. Stidd (eds.), *Wittgenstein in America*, 2001, and reprinted with permission from Oxford University Press.

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