BRILL

Critical Notice

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Claudine Verheggen (ed.), *Kripke's Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language at 40*

Guido Tana | ORCID: 0000-0002-6489-3448
Linguistics & Philosophy Centre, Istituto Universitario di Studi
Superiori Pavia, Pavia, Italy
tanaguido@gmail.com

Keywords

Kripkenstein is now in his 40s.[1] The radical skeptical paradox he introduced, and the controversial skeptical 'solution' he took the rule-following considerations to suggest, have been at the center of debates engaging some of the most important thinkers in the fields of philosophy of language, mind, normativity, Wittgenstein studies, and epistemology. This shouldn't come as a surprise: beginning with Wittgenstein's reflections in the *Philosophical Investigations*, the paradox Kripke identifies therein raises the profound metaphysical question of whether anything constitutes what we mean. When we follow the rule of addition, is there any fact that determines that we aren't actually following the rule of 'quaddition'? Is there any fact about us that can *justify* the way in

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1 Claudine Verheggen (ed.), *Kripke's Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language at 40*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pp. x + 277. ISBN: 9781009099103.

which we feel inclined to go on? His answer seems absurd: there is no such fact. This leads to the conclusion that no one means anything by their words. Kripke's proposed solution is equally radical: there are no facts about meaning, only communal and social assertability conditions for ascribing meaning to speakers. Kripke's reading also carries an important exegetical thesis: Wittgenstein's argument against the possibility of a private language draws its strength from the rule-following paradox.

Since the 80s, the discussion around the paradox has focused on using its threat to understand better what can constitute a viable theory of meaning.[2] Another line of inquiry has examined whether something like a rule-following paradox can indeed be found in Wittgenstein's original remarks.[3] More recently, debate around the rule-following problem has remained vigorous, especially concerning possible *solutions* to the paradox, such as normative primitivism (Ginsborg 2011, 2012) and the revival of dispositionalism (Warren 2020, Guardo 2022).

Amid the sustained attention the paradox continues to command,[4] a conference with the same name as the book under review took place at York University in Canada in 2022 to mark the fortieth anniversary of Kripke's book. This volume serves as a continuation of that conference, with all presented talks included here, alongside a few additional contributions. As the editor Claudine Verheggen notes in the introduction, the contemporary debate on the problem is less clearly characterized by a single unifying thread, but among its main features one can find attempts to provide viable non-reductionist (or primitivist) accounts of meaning and normativity, and a renewed examination of Kripke's communitarian and skeptical solution (pp. 3–4).[5] Keeping in mind this renewed outlook on the problem, in what follows we'll engage with a selection of contributions among the thirteen in this volume, focusing particularly on those dealing more prominently with the first line of inquiry Verheggen identifies.[6]

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2   The most important contributions in this initial phase of the debate were collected in Miller & Wright (2002).

3   The then-orthodox interpretation of Wittgenstein did not hesitate to condemn Kripke's reading of Wittgenstein as fundamentally flawed, as evidenced in Baker & Hacker's (1984) assessment. This criticism led to the coining of the term 'Kripkenstein' to refer to the position that gives rise to the skeptical paradox. For a defense of Kripke's reading, cf. Kusch (2006). It has become a common trope among philosophers influenced by Wittgenstein to view Kripke's reading as (at times) insightful, but (always) misguided.

4   As evidenced by the recent monographies by Jody Azzouni (2017), Thomas McNally (2017), James Shaw (2023), and Alexander Miller (2024).

5   Page quotations without bibliographical reference in this critical notice will refer to the book here discussed.

6   Due to space constraints, some contributions will be omitted from this critical notice. This should not be taken to imply that they are not worthy of engagement.

The first contribution, by Alexander Miller, focuses on one of the most prominent approaches in the contemporary debate: Hannah Ginsborg's *epistemological reading* of the problem and her associated 'primitivist' (non-reductionist) solution. Miller objects to both, in defense of the metaphysical character of rule-following skepticism concerning whether there is any *fact* about meaning. Ginsborg's epistemological reading is styled along the classical Cartesian dreaming argument, with the quaddition hypothesis substituting the dreaming scenario. Miller remarks that, for Ginsborg, the question hinges on the subject's having *evidence* justifying the claim that they meant 'plus' instead of 'quus'. The absence of such evidence entails that the subject does not know that she ought to answer '125' to accord with her previous uses. From this clearly epistemological sub-argument, a metaphysical conclusion follows: if one cannot know how one ought to use an expression consistently with one's past meaning, then one cannot mean anything by that expression (p. 19). Miller endorses the claim that the paradox does not rest merely on the presumption that we seemingly have no access to the meaning-constituting fact that we seek. Even if the omniscient God could look into a subject's mental history, there would not be any fact establishing that she meant 'plus' or 'quus' (Kripke 1982: 21).[7] The skeptical argument itself does not need to mention epistemic terms such as justification and knowledge; it follows simply from the absence of suitable facts that could determine meaning (p. 17).

Miller investigates why Ginsborg is drawn to this characterization of the rule-following problem. For Ginsborg, first, the metaphysical characterization admits of too easy a solution, i.e., the non-reductionist response. Second, the metaphysical characterization appears to adopt a form of verificationism. Lastly, claiming that the epistemological scenario is unessential to the paradox (cf. Boghossian 1989) could not explain the intuitive pull of Kripke's challenge on most philosophers who have engaged with it. Miller addresses each point with remarks and objections, but his main argument against Ginsborg lies elsewhere. He claims that the 'easiness' objection is the primary motivation for favoring the epistemological reading. However, he maintains that if non-reductionism provides such an easy answer to the metaphysical interpretation, this creates a problem for the epistemological reading (p. 26).

In developing her non-reductionism, Ginsborg (2018: 159) noticed that the availability of an 'easy answer'—the skeptic simply ignoring the possibility of

7   And Wittgenstein himself made a similar point about mathematics and omniscient beings: "I want to say: Even God can determine something mathematical only by mathematics. Even for him the mere rule of expansion cannot decide anything that it does not decide for us" (1957: VII §41).

'primitive facts' (about meaning—is a general feature of skeptical arguments. However, responding to the standard epistemological skeptic in this—dogmatic—fashion means simply not taking seriously its threat. Ginsborg appears to be arguing that such an answer is instead plausible against metaphysical skepticism. But this asymmetry is unacceptable for Miller. It would amount to seeing any 'non-inferentialist' answer to *epistemological* skepticism as never potentially genuine (p. 27). Following Wright (1984), if we reject such constraints as illicit, non-inferentialist replies can indeed be genuine against epistemological skepticism. Hence there is no asymmetry of the kind Ginsborg envisions (p. 28).

Perhaps Ginsborg might ultimately agree with this assessment. This is because her own answer to the rule-following problem *is* a variety of the non-reductionist, easy answer. Ginsborg's primitive normativity is the idea that "we can make sense of a notion of conformity to previous use that is independent of conformity to previous meaning" (2018: 162). Kripke is wrong—according to Ginsborg—in arguing that one needs to know that one really *meant* plus instead of quus to be 'confident' in responding '125'. The notion of accord is primitive, it does not depend on previous assumptions that one knows she was following a particular rule over another.

Miller doubts that this kind of primitive accord really is possible. In particular, Miller observes that different competent speakers of the same language will likely not have the same history concerning past usage of expressions. But if this is so and Ginsborg primitive point holds, we can have countlessly different cases of primitive accord that somehow magically converge on a single answer that all competent speakers *ought* to give. Concerning a numerical '+2' sequence, if we take a subject with a previous history of continuing it as '2, 4, 6, … 40' and another whose history is instead '2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 13, 14, … 40', how can it be maintained that both subjects ought to answer next '42' as a matter of 'primitive accord'? In order to rule out the second subject as 'making' a mistake, we must switch back to a semantic notion of accord (p. 33).

Miller's case against Ginsborg aims to show not only that her epistemological account of the problem is difficult to explain given Kripke's own treatment of it, but that her own preferred way out is either implausible or a pretense. While Miller's case is thorough, there are some perplexities it is bound to produce, even if one shares his position regarding Ginsborg's case. In particular, Miller might be overselling his point concerning the alleged plausibility of non-inferential answers to skepticism in general. In epistemology, non-inferential or neo-Moorean answers have often been met with resistance precisely because of what Ginsborg says, i.e., that they constitute a question-begging maneuver and amount to a merely dismissive answer to skepticism. The real question

that Ginsborg's proposal should be faced with is how she explains away the presumption that this kind of answer is any less problematic when applied to metaphysical skepticism.

Kripke's (1982: 51–52) own comments on *non-reductionist, sui generis* answers to the problem already highlighted that recourse to primitive normativity is hardly more than a mysterious *deus ex machina* that enables us to have our cake and eat it too. On this score, there might be a different argument against Ginsborg that Miller does not consider. If Ginsborg accepts that *sui generis* answers to epistemological skepticism are unconvincing, and if according to her own understanding of the rule-following problem its metaphysical conclusion rests upon an ineliminable (skeptical) epistemological sub-argument, why shouldn't her primitivist solution against it be dismissed as unconvincing because is *sui generis and* directed against a skeptical argument that is fundamentally epistemological? On the other hand, if Miller allows as genuine an 'easy', non-inferential answer to epistemological skepticism, then this runs the risk for him of rehabilitating Ginsborg's primitivist answer as well, against his own contention.

The second paper of the collection is by Hannah Ginsborg herself. Interestingly, her contribution is not meant to address objections to her primitivism directly. Instead, her goal is to show how her epistemological interpretation is best suited to understand rule-following skepticism, allowing the problem to appear in its most coherent and convincing form—one that Ginsborg's preferred solution will ultimately overcome.

Ginsborg argues that the epistemological interpretation is supported by Wittgenstein's own employment of the teacher-pupil case in the *Philosophical Investigations* (§185). More specifically, the rule-following paradox arises because there is an epistemological question about "knowing how to go on" (p. 41) in following a rule, a problem that the pupil example showcases. When the pupil starts to diverge in computing the numerical sequence from what the teacher expects, how does the teacher know that it is the pupil who is not going on correctly? Why is the teacher the one continuing the series in the correct way, in the way the numerical series is *meant* to be continued? (p. 40).

The epistemological reading of the rule-following problem leads to the metaphysical conclusion because it is the subject's *ignorance* of whether her own continuation is correct that forces her to take a *leap in the dark* when proceeding. This implies that the subject does not know how to continue the series, i.e., she does not understand it (p. 43). The metaphysical generalization follows that no one means anything by any expression. According to Ginsborg, Kripke's development of the problem seeks to identify certain facts whose

knowledge would provide a solution to the epistemological problem. The failure to accomplish this task leads the radical skeptical conclusion that "there is no phenomena as meaning or understanding" (p. 43). Kripke's reading has mostly avoided this interpretation in the literature because he frames the problem in terms of conformity to one's previous uses, thereby avoiding accusations of behaviorism (p. 44).

Does Ginsborg's understanding of the rule-following paradox make a stronger case for its threat and internal consistency? There are reasons to question this. The problem lies in Ginsborg's formulation of the rule-following problem, which explicitly makes meaning dependent on one's *knowledge* that one is following a certain rule rather than another. But this is a very intellectually demanding requirement, often understood in epistemology as the application of the KK principle: to know that *p*, S must be at least able to know that she knows that *p*. Not only does this requirement seem exceedingly difficult to satisfy, but it does fails to reflect what actually occurs in our ordinary linguistic lives. Understanding, or grasping, how a rule is to be followed can be seen as a relatively natural requirement for competent rule following, but this does not equate directly to the subject *knowing* that her response is metalinguistically correct.

This is an important point for Ginsborg's reading, as it may give an advantage to those who defend the metaphysical reading. Advocates of this 'traditional' reading maintain that the paradox does not stem from a traditional scenario, but rather from an unanswered question concerning whether there are facts that determine the meaning of our terms. While it is true that our lack of knowledge about such facts *does* undermine our ability to understand or grasp a rule— thereby depriving us of *justification* in proceeding in a certain way—this ignorance arises because the skeptic contends that there is nothing to know that could resolve the open metaphysical question. The metaphysical reading, unlike Ginsborg's epistemological reading, does not rely on contentious principles. By avoiding these, it presents a more formidable and consistent challenge to the notion of meaning.[8]

The problem extends to Ginsborg's response to the paradox as well. Her primitivism asserts that there is a primitive grasp (or understanding, or knowledge) of meaning-constituting facts when following a norm. Ginsborg

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8 Ginsborg maintains (p. 51) that the metaphysical reading suffers from "unargued reductionism." And yet, Kripke's original formulation of the problem, which is metaphysical, can hardly be said to be unargued for. The problem for non-reductionist answers is that, ultimately, they do not seem to offer an answer to the problem at all.

rejects the idea that my lack of knowledge about what I meant in past applications of the rules undermines my knowledge of what I mean now, i.e., my knowledge that what I do and say is metalinguistically correct (pp. 52–53). I remain skeptical of such responses to epistemological skepticism, much as I think that neo-Moorean responses like 'Here is a hand' lack any epistemic strength against Cartesian scenarios. Furthermore, it is problematic to base the skeptic's reasoning on a contentious requirement only to resolve it by rejecting that very same principle, which arguably should not have been accepted in the first place. Setting aside my assessment of Ginsborg's response, the problem is that, vis-à-vis the metaphysical version of the argument, that response is even more inadequate. It amounts to little more than a bare denial of the skeptic's claim that there are no meaning-constituting facts. The critical difference between the two positions is that Kripke's skeptic does provide an argument for why the non-factualist conclusion seems, at least *prima facie*, to follow, whereas Ginsborg's primitivism lacks a compelling counterargument and merely asserts that the skeptic's conclusion is wrong.[9]

Before turning to further contributions, I would like to briefly suggest an alternative epistemological reading of the argument. If we analyze the quaddition case and similar examples illustrating the paradox, it is quite clear that we are faced with an underdetermination problem. There seems to be no reason, evidence, or fact that can enable us to decide which alternative we mean. This makes our rule-following blind because it isa rationally arbitrary, and hence unjustified. Underdetermination principles are much less contentious in epistemology than the kind of clauses Ginsborg appeals to. Rejecting them would amount to denying that what we believe and do should be grounded in valid reasons. Framing the rule-following problem in terms of underdetermination would have two key advantages. First, it aligns with Ginsborg's accurate emphasis that the rule-following problem does concern how we can be *justified* in proceeding in a certain way, because addressing underdetermination would also explain why our proceeding in that way is justified. Second, it preserves the constitutivist/metaphysical idea that the

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9   At the very least, some justification should be provided to support the correctness of this response. Even contemporary epistemological dogmatists offer accounts of how epistemic warrant is ordinarily obtained without requiring the subject to know beforehand that skepticism is false. In contrast, Ginsborg's approach rests on the presumption of *possessing* such warrant. Ginsborg (2011) elaborates on this view by framing that primitive appropriateness of a given response as *Kantian* in spirit, specifically similar to the judgments of beauty in Kant's third critique (cf. pp. 234–235, 252). The problem is that, for Kant, such judgments lacked proper *cognitive*, i.e., epistemic weight.

problem arises because there seems to be no fact capable of establishing what determines meaning. This is because skeptical doubts rooted in underdetermination principles suggest that there might be after all no epistemically valid reason or fact for proceeding in a certain way.[10] An appraisal of the rule-following paradox along such lines would bridge the metaphysical and epistemological dimensions of the problem, showing that they are two sides of the same coin. Moreover, it would integrate the discussion of rule-following skepticism within the wider context of epistemological doubt.[11]

Two other papers, by James Shaw and Marie McGinn, share a common thread that intersects with the themes introduced in the first two. Both argue that the rule-following paradox can be addressed through a conception of normativity rooted in the uniform and natural ways we behave as normative subjects. Shaw and McGinn offer variations on what Shaw calls "naïve replies" to the problem': the skeptic can be countered by appealing to uniform patterns, regularity in our word usage, and the naturalness of "what happens" when we follow a particular a rule.

Shaw's interpretation aligns with aspects of Kripke's analysis of Wittgenstein's dialectic. In particular, Shaw correctly notices that the rule-following problem highlights two main questions: first, what kind of justification is available to support the application of a rule to new cases, and second, a what grammatical considerations guide us in saying that "such-and-such was meant" on a particular occasion (pp. 70–71). Interestingly, Shaw reads Wittgenstein as admitting that the first question finds no resolution in a particular fact. The second question also finds no necessary and sufficient conditions for its solution. However, this does not entail the non-factualism advocated by Kripke's skeptic. This is because the second question can be answered in a way that help support a non-skeptical conclusion for the first question as well.

Shaw reads §207 of *Philosophical Investigations* as proposing that what gives us correct guidance in claiming that we meant something on a particular occasion is a matter of *regular* connection between what speakers say and do.

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10   This is one of the consequences of Jonathan Schaffer's (2010) *debasing* demon scenario. I argue in Tana (2024, MS) that it should be understood as a variety of underdetermination problem. See also Cunningham (2021) and Janvid (2024).

11   This is something that is lacking in contemporary epistemology. Indeed, Ginsborg's epistemological reading has not led to a broader engagement with the rule-following problem in the contemporary epistemological literature. A possible alternative approach is to frame rule-following skepticism as a form of *Kantian* skepticism, upon which epistemological doubts depend (cf. Conant 2012, Bridges 2014, and Geier 2020). This approach might be compatible with the underdetermination route suggested.

Meaningful language is a matter of regularity. The rule-following problem is solved by invoking the concept of "the most regular and uniform continuation" of a rule (p. 74). What is the anti-skeptical force of this idea? Shaw develops it by asking whether the language of uniformity is dialectically permissible in engaging the skeptic (p. 80). Shaw argues that it is but offers less-than-compelling arguments in support. He presents a pupil-teacher example to argue that "the ordinary notions of uniformity ... are directly conceptually tied to the continuation of usage that we regard as giving the meanings of our words." He considers the Kripkean reply that what seems like regularity might instead be *schregularity*, but he says that this problem would apply only to past usage of the language of uniformity or past intentions, but not to *present* ones (pp. 81–82).

The problem with this maneuver is twofold. First, it neglects that Wittgenstein own teacher-pupil cases can be employed to argue *against* simple reliance on the notion of uniformity. When the teacher corrects the pupil, why is the pupil's continuation the one labeled as *less regular*? What normative authority allows us to make *this judgment*? This question is tied to the second problem of Shaw's account. His account appears to resemble the kind of answer offered by Ginsborg. However, Shaw's proposal, what is considered primitive is the recognition that a continuation is *more uniform* than other continuations. But what determines what is most uniform in this context? If the appeal to natural properties is excluded, it seems Shaw is left merely with an affirmation that privileges a particular understanding of possible continuations over others. He himself states that "'regular' as used in the past will take on the meaning corresponding to the most regular continuation of its past privileged use" (p. 84). The obvious problem is that to privilege a particular use as the most regular continuation involves an interpretation and an acknowledgement of something as being *the most regular*. But this connects meaning to interpretation, and the rule-following paradox resurfaces in the guise Wittgenstein first sketched it. We can always provide an interpretation that makes our course of action accord with a particular rule (Wittgenstein 1953: §201). This becomes even more problematic if we take the language of uniformity as *fact-stating,* as Shaw does (p. 85).

McGinn's paper aims to re-assess the kind of naturalism present in Wittgenstein's later writings. This naturalism is characterized by the idea that our approach to meaning should be fundamentally *descriptive*. However, McGinn seeks to provide an interpretation of it that avoids both *quietism* and the reductionist implications of interpretations such as Crispin Wright's, which explain meaning as a matter of non-normative primitive *dispositions* (p. 89).

McGinn's analysis highlights the often-mentioned Wittgensteinian idea that, in describing how we use words, we should resist the temptation to introduce 'shadowy' intermediaries between what we say and what we do (p. 91). Drawing on the *Philosophische Grammatik*, McGinn argues that the temptation to conceive of meaning as something that comes before the mind is a possible byproduct of naturalistic description. In contrast, McGinn maintains that what comes to a speaker's mind when we understand a word is just the word itself—there is no supplement to the mere sign. Understood this way, naturalism can serve as an anti-Platonist, anti-psychologistic, and non-reductive treatment of meaning that avoids Kripke's paradox (p. 94).

McGinn's reading makes a compelling point by connecting this perspective to Wittgenstein's own conception that there need be no intermediary between what we mean and what we say. His reflections in the *Investigations* converge on the idea that signs need no supplementation to mean what we ordinarily take them to mean. This strongly suggests that Wittgenstein himself did not endorse the radical skeptical conclusion that there is no meaning at all, as McGinn notes (p. 95). When we mean something, we do not fall short of the fact (Wittgenstein 1953: §95). McGinn uses this to argue that the rule-following considerations in Wittgenstein's text do not attack, as Kripke allegedly maintained, the common-sense view of meaning.

This point is interesting because, while it is surely true that Wittgenstein does not take his reflections to undermine what he conceives as the 'common-sense' view of meaning, it is questionable whether the conception of meaning that Wittgenstein sees as common-sense really is so. Wittgenstein's account is much more deflationary than some Wittgensteinian philosophers assume, and it sometimes obscures the fact that even in our everyday use of words, weighty theoretical stances might be tacitly assumed and endorsed. The initial reaction of any layperson to the paradox is one of incredulity: "What do you mean that I do not know what I mean? It is a plain fact that 'plus' means what *I* take it to mean." When we use words, we take them to mean what we believe they mean, and we do ordinarily presume that there *is* some matter of fact that determines their meaning. We can't be wrong about this in the way envisioned by the skeptic. McGinn writes: "Normally, the possibility that there are other applications of a rule that we are familiar with and employ in our everyday life with language does not even occur to us" (p. 98). What safeguards the ordinary way in which we understand the meaning of our words is not simply a matter of not being presented with possible alternatives. And yet, if we were presented with such a possibility, it is not certain that we would naturally adopt the Wittgensteinian perspective. It seems much more likely that we'd instead dismiss the presented alternative by citing some purported fact (mental event,

interpretation, disposition, etc.) that we claim demonstrates unambiguously what we meant.[12] It is this *meaning-determinist* stance that is the object of the skeptical attack. Kripke appears *prima facie* correct in viewing this meaning-determinism as closely aligned with how we naively understand our rule-based behavior.

Adopting Wittgenstein's picture, where meaning-determinism is not the ordinary common-sense position, is not something that should be taken for granted. Recognizing instead that our everyday use of language reflects a more theoretically substantial perspective allows us to see that the two conceptions of common sense addressed by Wittgenstein and Kripke are not the same.[13] Wittgenstein's account explains the naturalness with which we use words, whereas Kripke's account explains the assumptions that underlie such an unreflective use and that emerge when we are presented with alternative possibilities.

This is highly relevant to McGinn's claim that Wittgenstein's common-sense picture is unaffected by rule-following skepticism. This picture is a matter of regularity, agreement, and stability in what we do, grounded in the customary and natural mastery of our language (p. 100). But would a layperson agree with this idea that there is nothing more to meaning than what we are naturally inclined to do? The risk is that such a position might seem perilously close to the idea that meaning is subjective—that whatever we take to be right *is* right. The way it can be countenanced seems instead to require some kind of skeptical therapy, such as that suggested by Kripke's paradox, which challenges the idea that there exist meaning-determining *facts*.

McGinn does address this problem by arguing that meaning is not settled by subjective projections but by the context of ongoing human practices. The forms of human action establish the customary ways of using expressions to mean what we say (p. 101). However, two intuitive problems arise from this account. First, it seems uncomfortably close to a kind of forms-of-life Platonism. This objection, often raised against quietist interpretations of Wittgenstein,[14] states that appealing to the naturalness of our forms of life

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12   And, as many philosophers might recall from interactions with first-year students, when such meaning-deterministic ways are rejected, the fallback position is often some form of naïve relativism.

13   Of course, this means that if Kripke is reading into Wittgenstein his own conception of common-sense theory of meaning, then he is wrong. However, Kripke's exegetical claims are confined to the rule-following considerations in the *Investigations*, not to the whole of Wittgenstein's position.

14   Of the kind defended, for example, by John McDowell (1984). For expressions of this criticism, see Zalabardo (2003: 317–319) and Guardo (2018: 78). Even some advocates of this perspective have acknowledged this problem (see Finkelstein 2000: 72–73).

ultimately reinstates a meaning-determinist position—albeit one rooted not in a transcendent Platonic realm but an intra-mundane domain of shared habits. Second, if we follow McGinn in viewing this naturalness as grounded in what we take for granted (p. 102)—a normative mastery acquired through our participation in a linguistic community (p. 104)—how does this differ from Kripke's solution based on interpersonal assertability conditions?

As mentioned at the outset, one of the initial responses to Kripke's presentation of the paradox was to extract from an engagement with the rule-following skeptic a positive and substantial theory of meaning. The two papers by Claudine Verheggen and Olivia Sultanescu both aim to advance this perspective. Verheggen seeks to find such positive proposals already present in Wittgenstein's writings, while Sultanescu starts from Kripke's treatment of non-reductionism.

Verheggen's paper begins with a crucial idea: quietist readings of Wittgenstein share with Kripke's reading the same conception of the paradox-based challenge, namely, the quest for a foundational account of meaning. While quietists reject this quest as illegitimate, Kripke argues that it is impossible to fulfill (p. 143). However, both ultimately converge on a similar outcome: a purely semantic and descriptive conception of meaning. Verheggen's thesis is that Wittgenstein is not a quietist about meaning, and that his conception of meaning as use raises a different metasemantic challenge that Kripke overlooks. This challenge lies in reconciling the idea of meaning as use with the claim that meaning is 'objective' (p. 144). Engaging with this challenge allows Wittgenstein's positive conception of meaning to emerge.

Verheggen's argument hinges on a reconstruction of the three stances she takes Wittgenstein to attack in the *Philosophical Investigations*. These are:

> *Referentialism*: the view that every word stands for an object, and this object constitutes its meaning.
> *Essentialism*: the idea that there is a universal common property shared by all things that fall under a given term.
> *Mental Occurrences*: the claim that understanding a word involves its entire use coming before our mind.

Verheggen rightly observes that, for Wittgenstein, none of these positions can suffice to determine meaning. Without a specific interpretation, these frameworks allow for incompatible applications of words (p. 148). At bottom, this *associative* conception of meaning makes it possible that every application of a word can be reconciled with its presumed meaning.

Verheggen's achievement in this paper lies in her framing of the issues related to the associative conception meaning as a problem of normative

authority: "How is it established that a given word's meaning is determined by one or the other of a myriad of 'meanings'?"[15] Wittgenstein's insight is the recognition that describing what our words mean does not entail reducing meaning to non-semantically described use (p. 152). But then, how can one claim be 'correct' among the many alternatives exposed by the paradox? Wittgenstein's non-quietism acts precisely at this juncture. While Wittgenstein holds that meaning is use, he also observes that when an ordinary speaker is asked why they applied a rule in a certain way, they defend the idea that meanings are governed by *standards of correctness* (p. 154). It is not a matter of simply identifying a *natural* continuation, as in McGinn's proposal. We use words and rules with the assumption that they mean what they mean.

For Verheggen, the crucial insight here is the concept of *agreement.* Describing how we use language involves investigating how words are used when people communicate with each other (p. 155). For human communication to be meaningful, mere shared definitions or naturalness aren't sufficient. Only by thinking of language as shared can one make sense of its being *objective* and *based on use* (p. 156). The problem of whatever seems right to one being right applies only to the isolated individual, as such an individual cannot establish objective standards. Objectivity is possible within as social, public context, where it arises from the *negotiation* of normative constraints by members of a community (p. 157). Kripke, by contrast, views the meta-semantic question that leads to the paradox more narrowly than Wittgenstein, focusing on the search for a meaning-constituting *fact* (p. 159). Kripke's skeptical solution is predicated on an impossibility of conceiving meaning as anything else than the fact-based, meaning-determinist picture that the paradox shows to be untenable (p. 160).

In Verheggen's contribution, there is much to appreciate, both in her rejection of the quietist interpretations often overemphasized in Wittgenstein's writings and in her recognition that the skeptical conclusion Kripke draws form the paradox is, in certain respects, limited. However, two points warrant further investigation. First, while agreement is indeed central to Wittgenstein's account of language and norms, there are reasons to doubt whether it can sustain the positive conception of meaning Verheggen attributes to him. This is because Wittgenstein's writings challenge the idea that mere agreement suffices to uphold a determinate linguistic framework, particularly with regard to the attempt to establish the *objectivity* of what we say and do (cf. Wittgenstein 1957: VI, §49, VII, §11; 1967: §§429, 431, 620; 1969: §§ 243, 599, 609). Perhaps the route to take here would be to extend Verheggen's notion of

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15   At heart, this is still an underdetermination problem, one where reasons must be provided to avoid a chosen association to be *arbitrary.*

negotiation beyond agreement alone. This could also enhance Kripke's idea that assertability conditions rest on the brute fact of general agreement and intersubjective control (1982: 97). Second, one may question whether the meta-semantic problem Verheggen identifies in Wittgenstein—and claims Kripke overlooked—is really absent from Kripke's original treatment. Verheggen seems to side too much with the metaphysical/constitutivist reading of the paradox, overlooking the fact that there is also a specific problem of rational authority in Kripke's own formulation: the question of what *justifies* us in continuing in a certain way. It could be maintained that Kripke does not ignore the problem of the relationship between objectivity and meaning-as-use. Rather, the 'skeptical' aspect of his solution directly engages this problem. It is skeptical because, from the perspective of meaning-determinism, only a superlative fact could guarantee the objectivity of meaning. Nevertheless, it is still a solution that aligns with the Wittgensteinian perspective Verheggen envisions.

Sultanescu's contribution deals with an issue that recurs in many papers discussed here (Ginsborg, Shaw, McGinn): the challenge of providing a robust non-reductive response to the skeptical paradox without succumbing to the critique that non-reductionism merely "brushes the question under the rug." Sultanescu's analysis remains firmly grounded in Kripke's text and its reception, setting aside perspectives more directly tied to the Wittgensteinian approach. Notably, Sultanescu develops a critique of the metaphysical reading similar to the one we briefly proposed in discussing Verheggen's paper. This critique suggests that the metaphysical question involves more than the issue of how there can be a standard of correctness or what constitutes meaning in general. Equally significant is the question of our *meaningful* (*intentional*) *use* of our words—how we are *justified* in proceeding in a certain way. For Sultanescu, the standard interpretation fails to recognize that, for Kripke, it is crucial to account for how the internalization of a rule applies even to those instances where the rule has not yet been internalized.

For Sultanescu, the importance of highlighting this question is as follows: if the paradox were merely a fact-finding inquiry about meaning and correctness criteria, the non-reductionist response would indeed amount to sweeping the problem under the rug by simply reiterating that meaning states are *sui generis*. However, a more convincing non-reductionist naïve reply is available: when following a rule and are queried about our normative actions, we can provide an inferential justification for them (p. 168).[16] To defend this possibility,

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16   Note how this is in line with my earlier observations about the ordinary conception of meaning that McGinn overlooks—namely, the idea that, in our everyday lives, we can point to reasons if queried about why we are following a particular rule.

Sultanescu engages with Wright's (2007) criticism of inferentialist replies to the paradox. Wright argues that inferentialism presupposes a commitment to a rule and the ability to judge that the conditions for application are met (p. 169). For Wright, this model falters in basic cases of language use because it assumes that subjects can think about the world before they are capable of saying things about it—a view that is functionally identical to the Augustinian picture of language Wittgenstein already rejected. In such basic uses, language use does not involve reason-responsiveness.

Sultanescu argues that this conclusion can only arise from the common assumption that Wright and Kripke share: that non-reductive, *sui generis* responses to the paradox must be grounded in *primitive facts*. However, this approach reduces contentfulness to a basic datum, leaving its normative force unintelligible. Sultanescu's alternative is to view non-reductionism as involving "a commitment to the claim that the elucidation of what it is for us to use expressions meaningfully is bound to exploit the notion of meaningful use" (p. 172). In this way, non-reductionism is *a view from within* meaning itself.

What does it mean to view meaning and understanding as non-reductively from the inside? It means that we must conceive of the reasons for using expressions as accessible only to subjects already committed to standards governing their use (p. 173). In terms of *justifying* how we can go on, this seems to offer a *prima facie* answer: to use our words meaningfully is to have a reason for its *use*.[17] Standards of correctness explain and guide our usage of expressions, as we can appeal to them to justify our usage when challenged; if we didn't see them as supporting our usage, we wouldn't use our expressions in the way we do (p. 174). However, how does this conception illuminate those basic cases of language or concept use that Wright claimed remain mysterious and primitive? What can we say in defense of our employment of basic concepts like 'table'?

Here, Sultanescu's proposal reveals its weaknesses. She argues that ultimately "it is because the world is the way it is that I judge in the ways in which I do. It is the world that guides me in my thinking, and I will point to the world if I am pressed to justify my thinking" (p. 176). While distinct from Ginsborg's naïve reply—which excluded reasons-responsiveness altogether—Sultanescu's position appears to come close to the kind of *liberalized* Platonism, borrowed from John McDowell, that we mentioned when discussing McGinn's paper. There are some basic, conceptual items that constitute our engagement with the world, and these are always capable of providing us with normative justification. The problem with such a perspective is that, even if it is a

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17   See Sultanescu's (2023) idea of *guidance constraint*.

liberalized form of Platonism, it is still Platonism. By positing that some things *just are* a certain way, Kripke's verdict on this endpoint as 'mysterious' remains in place.[18]

Sultanescu attempts to deflect this issue by arguing that shifting the focus to the metaphysical grounds of her proposal transforms the inquiry from a descriptive to a foundational one (p. 177). However, this response is problematic. It is true that one of the questions that the rule-following paradox raises is what justifies us in going on in a certain way, and from a first-level perspective one could respond that what guides us is how things are. However, the rule-following paradox also poses a deeper problem: how the contents of meaningful states are determined. This is the paradox's original question— whether we meant 'plus' or 'quus' in calculating. Ignoring this question when proposing an account of what justifies us in going on in a certain way seems *ad hoc*. Surely, at least in the context of the rule-following-paradox, separating its two aspects is unwarranted. But in doing so, Sultanescu's answer appears to be guilty of the same fault as *sui generis* answers: it sweeps (part of) the problem under the rug.

The papers examined in this critical review all share a crucial feature: they depart from the "impatience" or "antipathy" often displayed in earlier waves of engagement with rule-following skepticism. In the past, this skepticism was dismissed as "absurd" or seen as an overly radical interpretation of Wittgenstein's works.[19] Among the 13 papers in this collection, such dismissive attitudes are notably absent. Both the systematic and the exegetical aspects of Kripke's Wittgenstein are treated as opportunities to grapple with profound and insightful problems concerning the possibility of meaning, the nature of normativity, and Wittgenstein's reflections on these topics.

As we have highlighted, the debates advanced in these contributions bear significant implications for foundational philosophical issues. The papers demand serious engagement and critical questioning, as the comments, objections, and assessments raised in this review aim to demonstrate. This collection stands as a testament to the level of scrutiny and theoretical

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18 This issue is even more problematic for Sultanescu, given her claim that this perspective is an internal one. But if that is the case, on what basis can we presume that how things seem to us to be actually *ought* to guide us in our rule-following?

19 It the established literature, it is common to see the rule-following problem treated as something to be dissolved, explained away, or even eradicated, as if it arises solely from a fundamentally mistaken or misguided conception of norms and language. The New Wittgensteinians persist in advocating a purely therapeutic approach to the problem (see Pier 2024), but notably, they are absent from the contributors to this volume.

sophistication that the debates on rule-following have attained. Moreover, it underscores the extent to which the rule-following paradox has established itself as a vital field of philosophical inquiry that deserves broader engagement. In particular, from the perspective of contemporary epistemology, where this variety of skepticism is often overlooked, future research would benefit from closer attention to the ideas, arguments, and challenges that the rule-following problem provokes. This collection presents an excellent opportunity for contemporary philosophers to take seriously the enduring challenges at the heart of the rule-following paradox.

Statements and Declarations

The Author declares there are no conflicts of interest.

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AQ1— Please provide an Abstract for this article.