

Wittgenstein, objectivity and rule-following:  
towards resolving the communitarian vs.  
individualism debate

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## Abstract

The question of whether the concept of a rule-follower presupposes more than a single individual came into prominence in the wake of Ludwig Wittgenstein's considerations on rule-following, found primarily in his *Philosophical Investigations* (1953). Since then, a debate on the substantive side of the question (in addition to an exegetical one) has been waged between three sides, namely individualists, communitarians, and quietists. Briefly, individualists claim that the concept of a rule-follower does not presuppose more than one individual, while communitarians contend that it does so presuppose, and finally quietists argue that there is no determinate answer to the question.

This thesis is an attempt to work towards resolving the debate on the substantive question by examining the arguments proposed by these three sides and deciding which of them is the most tenable. The individualist arguments I contend with include those from A. J. Ayer, G. P. Baker and P. M. S. Hacker, Simon Blackburn, John Canfield, Grant Gillett, and Jussi Haukioja. The communitarian arguments evaluated here include those from Donald Davidson, Norman Malcolm, John McDowell, Rush Rhees, Claudine Verheggen, Meredith Williams, and Saul Kripke's Wittgenstein. Finally, I also examine the arguments of the proponents of quietism, namely Edward Minar and Martin Gustafsson.

I argue that the proponents of all three sides of the debate have thus far failed to present convincing cases for their claims. Individualists have largely neglected to take their opponents' arguments into account and so risk begging the question against them, the arguments of the communitarians lack crucial justification, and the quietists' attempts at undermining either side rely on misconceptions of the debate itself. However, the work done here in considering all these arguments enables us to see that individualism emerges as the most tenable position to hold in the end.

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## Introduction

Much of human life is structured around the existence of rules or standards. That we act as if there are standards that demarcate between things that are in accord and discord with them is a fundamental component of understanding human interaction. Values, what counts as acceptable behaviour, legal statutes, criteria for rational behaviour, how to use an expression according to its meaning, and standards of measurement all pervade and structure our day-to-day experience. However, the very idea that there are such things as rules or standards raises many interesting philosophical puzzles. In particular, certain philosophers have wondered about the relationship between rules and those who follow them, and if the very notion of a rule-follower presupposes a community. In other words, could we ever make sense of rules being followed by just one individual who has never interacted with another?

This thesis is an attempt to help settle the question of whether the concept of a rule-follower is a concept that presupposes more than a single individual. Given that this is the central question of this thesis it would be prudent to provide some clarifications on it. The first thing to clarify is that the question poses a conceptual rather than empirical question. In other words, the question does not concern the psychological or cognitive processes by which humans come to grasp and follow rules. As such, the answer to the question is unrestrained by scientific facts; even if it is impossible, as far as psychology and cognitive science is concerned, that a human can never grasp and follow a rule unless they have interacted with another person, this still does not affect the outcome of our query. After all, such empirical impossibility is still compatible with the claim that there may be possible worlds inhabited by beings with different psychological and cognitive endowments than us, who might be able to follow rules despite being lifelong solitaries. Consequently, because we are trying to ascertain whether or not there are such possible worlds, our investigation must proceed via conceptual analysis rather than scientific investigation; rather than appealing to experiments, we must ask whether or not there is any conceptual confusion, incoherence, or contradiction in thinking that a lifelong solitary individual or an individual considered in isolation can follow a rule.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For a longer discussion of the distinction between the conceptual and empirical reading of this question, see (Champlin, 1992).

At this juncture, one might object that merely examining the concept of a rule-follower is insufficient for deciding whether there are any possible worlds where a lifelong solitary individual is a rule-follower. For example, it might be proposed by some who hold a theory of reference for natural kinds that the issue is analogous to the case of water and H<sub>2</sub>O: we cannot resolve the question of whether there is any possible world where water is not H<sub>2</sub>O by merely examining the concept of water or the concept of H<sub>2</sub>O. This is because 'water' is a natural-kind term and so despite the fact that 'water' is not synonymous with 'H<sub>2</sub>O', it remains true that water is identified with its underlying physical constitution in the actual world, i.e., H<sub>2</sub>O molecules, and so there is no possible world where water is not H<sub>2</sub>O. So, analogously, might it not be the case that 'rule-follower' is a natural-kind term and so even if it is not a conceptual truth that rule-followers are not lifelong solitaries, it might still be true that rule-followers are identified with certain underlying physical constitutions in the actual world that can only be obtained through interaction with others (e.g., certain neural wiring), and so there is no possible world where a rule-follower is someone who hasn't interacted with another?

However, this line of argument depends on the claim that 'rule-follower' is a natural kind term, and this is highly questionable. This is because natural kind terms demand homogeneity in the underlying physical constitution of the things they refer to, and should it be discovered that there is no such underlying homogeneity, we would be forced in the direction of an error-theory for those terms. For instance, suppose we discover that what we have been calling 'water' actually has no underlying physical homogeneity, such that the stuff with the superficial characteristics of water is wildly heterogeneous at the molecular level. In such a case, we would be forced in the direction of an error theory according to which there is no such thing as water; according to which all non-negative atomic statements involving 'water' are systematically false. But contrast this case with rule-followers: suppose we discover that the people who we have been calling 'rule-followers' actually have no underlying homogeneity, such that there is no neural wiring, etc. that all and only rule-followers share. In such a case, in contrast to water, we would not be forced in the direction of an error theory and the claim that there are no rule-followers. Thus, in order to address the issue of whether there are possible worlds where there are lifelong solitary rule-followers, it is adequate to focus on analysing the concept of a rule-follower.

Having secured the point that it is the conceptual question that we should be focusing on, the next point of clarification is that this question is not asking for a theory that provides necessary and sufficient conditions for being a rule-follower. For while it might seem to some that the question demands that we come up with an exhaustive set of criteria that determines—in all possible situations involving an individual—whether or not that individual is a rule-follower, the question is actually more modest in scope. For all that is asked is whether or not there is a particular necessary condition for being a rule-follower, namely the condition of possessing a certain relation with another individual.

With these clarifications in mind we can talk a little about the question's history. The question of whether the concept of a rule-follower presupposes more than one individual came into prominence for philosophers in the wake of Ludwig Wittgenstein's considerations on rule-following, found primarily in his *Philosophical Investigations* (1953, hereafter *PI*). Wittgenstein was read by some commentators to have provided a convincing case against the idea that it is possible for a lifelong solitary individual to follow a rule. From this spawned an exegetical debate on whether or not Wittgenstein really did argue against the conceptual possibility of lifelong solitary rule-followers, a debate spurred on by the fact that Wittgenstein himself never gave an explicit statement of his position on the issue and that his arguments are more open to interpretation than we would like.<sup>2</sup> However, in time the debate came to acquire the interest of philosophers who were not merely interested in what Wittgenstein had to say on the matter but whether there was any rational merit to the claim that the concept of rule-following presupposed more than one individual. Thus, there are exegetical and substantive aspects to this debate, where the former concerns what Wittgenstein thought about the conceptual possibility of solitary rule-followers, and where the latter concerns the rational justifications for whether or not lifelong solitary rule-followers are conceptually possible. On this note, it is important to point out that my interest in this debate is on the substantive rather than the exegetical issue, and so despite the fact that the ensuing discussion will heavily involve

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<sup>2</sup> This difficulty in resolving the exegetical issue is reiterated by Martin Gustafson, who writes: "The existence of this sharp and persistent disagreement among prominent Wittgenstein scholars is thought-provoking. [...] Each group [of interpreters] has its own favourite pieces of textual evidence [...]. But if the different passages adduced by the different groups are weighed together, I think it has to be acknowledged that no clear verdict can be reached. We should, I think, admit that Wittgenstein's writings just do not provide us with a clear positive or negative answer to the question, 'Does rule-following require a community of rule-followers?'" (2004, p. 128).

Wittgenstein's thoughts as well as those of his interpreters, our primary focus will be on evaluating their philosophical merit rather than how accurately they portray Wittgenstein.

One final point of stage-setting needs to be made. Readers familiar with this debate might have wondered why the question has been framed only in terms of rule-following rather than language-use. For doesn't the debate also concern whether the concept of a language-user presupposes more than one individual? Indeed so, and I intend to talk interchangeably between language-use and rule-following as far as the debate is concerned. The reason for initially framing the debate in terms of rule-following is to allow us to isolate and state the reasons for thinking that the debate has an impact on language-use as well. The reason is as follows. Rule-following is *analogous* to the use of meaningful expressions in that just as there are conditions for correctly following a rule, there are also conditions for correctly applying a meaningful expression. Moreover, these correctness conditions are necessary: we cannot make sense of either rule-following or language-use unless we can make sense of there being a distinction between correct and incorrect applications of a rule or meaningful expression. And so, if there is an argument to the effect that a lifelong solitary individual cannot follow a rule because we cannot make sense of correctness conditions applying to his actions, then this argument can be adapted to claim that a lifelong solitary individual also cannot use meaningful expressions, and vice versa. Consequently, given that the arguments in this debate mostly concern whether we can make sense of correctness conditions in the case of solitary rule-following or solitary language-use, it thus seems justifiable to say that the debate concerns whether lifelong solitary rule-following *and* language-use are possible.<sup>3</sup>

### Three sides of the debate

The next step is to introduce the three main sides of the debate:

#### **Individualism:**

The concept of a rule-follower is a concept of something that does not presuppose more than a single individual. For the concept of a rule-follower to apply to an individual, it is

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<sup>3</sup> The relation between rule-following and language-use described here is taken from Miller's Introduction in (Miller & Wright, 2002). Moreover, by saying that it is through argument by analogy that the debate on solitary rule-following impacts upon solitary language-use, we thereby avoid the claim that the impact is due to the idea that language-use is parasitic on rule-following. This latter idea has received criticism from Boghossian (1989, pp. 516–517).

not necessary that he is considered in relation to others or that he has some relation with another individual. Lifelong solitary rule-followers are thus conceptually possible. Proponents include: A. J. Ayer, G. P. Baker and P. M. S. Hacker, Simon Blackburn, John Canfield, Grant Gillett, and Jussi Haukioja.

### **Communitarianism**

#### *i. Modest version:*

The concept of a rule-follower is a concept that presupposes more than a single individual, in the sense that for the concept of a rule-follower to apply to an individual, it is necessary that he is considered in the right sort of relation with respect to others. Lifelong solitary rule-followers are conceptually possible as long as they satisfy this proviso. Proponents include: Kripke's Wittgenstein.

#### *ii. Robust version:*

The concept of a rule-follower is a concept that presupposes more than a single individual, in the sense that for the concept of a rule-follower to apply to an individual, it is necessary that he has the right sort of relation with another individual. Lifelong solitary rule-followers are conceptually impossible because they have no such relation with another individual.<sup>4</sup> Proponents include: Donald Davidson, Norman Malcolm, John McDowell, Rush Rhees, Claudine Verheggen, and Meredith Williams.

### **Quietism:**

The question of whether the concept of a rule-follower is a concept that presupposes more than a single individual is itself problematic, and there is no determinate answer to it.<sup>5</sup> Thus, both individualism and communitarianism are mistaken in their attempts to give a determinate answer to the question. Proponents include: Edward Minar and Martin Gustafsson.

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<sup>4</sup> My definition of the robust communitarian view of language is broader than that of Claudine Verheggen's definition of the communitarian view, where mine would include both the interpersonal view and the communitarian view as characterised by her. Verheggen distinguishes these two views as subsumed under what she calls the social view of language in (Verheggen, 2006). For my present purposes, what I take as the robust communitarian view of language is synonymous with what Verheggen would call the social view of language: it is the broad view that states that the concept of a language user applies to an individual only if that individual has the right sort of relation with another.

<sup>5</sup> To clarify, the quietist view defined here is a substantive view about the concept of rule-follower. It is distinct from the position that simply refrains from taking either the individualist or communitarian side while still holding that there is a determinate answer as to which side is correct.

## Methodological approach and plan

An important methodological consideration for resolving the debate between these three sides is to realise how the burdens of proof are distributed. Given the outline of these three positions, I wish to claim that the burden of proof lies mainly with those who oppose individualism, i.e., with communitarianism and quietism. This is because of the following general consideration: if competent users of a concept share a particular intuition about that concept, then—in the absence of plausible arguments against that intuition—that intuition is justifiably held. In other words, it is not necessary to supply arguments in support of a widespread intuition about a concept, *if* there are no plausible arguments against it. To be sure, this only applies for our intuitions about *concepts*; if I have an intuition about, say, the distance between the Sun and Earth, then I would rightly be expected to offer some arguments in support of my intuition even if there are no arguments against it.

Having said this, I presume that most competent users of the concepts of a language-user or rule-follower share the intuition that such concepts do not presuppose more than a single individual. In other words, most competent users of the concepts of a language-user or a rule-follower would hold that it is possible for a lifelong solitary to follow a rule. Consequently, if there are no plausible arguments against individualism, then individualism is vindicated; no further arguments are needed on behalf of individualism once its opposing arguments have been rejected.

With these considerations in mind, the overall plan of this thesis is to examine the three sides of the debate through evaluating the arguments that their proponents supply. I will argue that all three sides exhibit various flaws in arguing for their claims. With regards to the individualists, I will show how most of their arguments fail to take into account the arguments of their opponents, and so these individualists are guilty of begging the question against them. For the communitarians, I will indicate how their arguments lack crucial justification in some cases, and how in other cases their arguments are in fact compatible with individualism. As for the quietists, I will demonstrate how their attempts to undermine both individualism and communitarianism ultimately rely on misconceptions of the debate itself.

But despite all sides exhibiting such flaws, I shall conclude in favour of individualism. The reasons for this are as follows. Firstly, the main flaw of the individualists is simply that they fail to adequately respond to the arguments of their opponents, but as far as their thesis goes I find no fault with it. Secondly, I do find fault with the arguments of the opponents of individualism, i.e., with communitarianism and quietism. And so, after taking into account the aforementioned burdens of proof in this debate, individualism emerges as the most justifiable position to hold.

## Chapter outlines

### *Chapter 1: Kripke's Wittgenstein's communitarian argument*

I begin by presenting and evaluating one of the most influential communitarian arguments in the literature, namely Wittgenstein's communitarian argument as it struck Saul Kripke (henceforth the argument of 'Kripke's Wittgenstein' or 'KW'). Many of the subsequent positions in the debate orientate themselves around this argument and so having a clear view of its themes and argumentative strategy will allow us to have a point of reference to help appraise these other arguments. However, despite this argument's significance, I argue that it ultimately fails to reach its communitarian conclusion.

### *Chapter 2: Pre-KW discussions*

Next, I shall present two early debates on the individualism vs. communitarian issue before the advent of KW's argument. These debates see A.J. Ayer going against Rush Rhees, and P.M.S. Hacker and G.P. Baker contending with Norman Malcolm. One of the primary aims of this chapter is show how the communitarian arguments before KW lack substantive theoretical considerations, and so they fall easily to appeals to intuition and thought experiments by their individualist opponents. This will also serve to highlight how the debate post-KW should proceed: communitarians should propose arguments that match or exceed the depth of argument found in KW, while individualists should contend with the substantive theoretical considerations of their opponents when they are presented.

### *Chapter 3: Post-KW individualists*

This chapter will survey the arguments of three individualist proponents writing in the period after KW's argument, namely John Canfield, Grant Gillett, and Jussi Haukioja. While these three authors all take up opposition to KW's communitarian argument, I argue

that they fail to appreciate the theoretical considerations behind it. Instead, they rely on the argumentative strategies employed by their predecessors like Ayer, and Baker and Hacker, such as appeals to intuition and thought experiments, that are ineffective in dealing with the theoretical considerations that power KW's communitarian argument. As a result, the success of their cases for individualism depends on the precarious assumption that communitarian authors do not provide arguments that match the level of sophistication of KW's argument.

#### *Chapter 4: Post-KW communitarians*

In this chapter I present the communitarian arguments proposed by four authors, namely Donald Davidson, John McDowell, Claudine Verheggen, and Meredith Williams. Instructively, these authors substantiate their arguments with theoretical examinations of meaning and rule-following, and so they each present a case for communitarianism that is beyond the scope of the individualist proponents considered in the previous chapter. However, despite these advancements, I shall argue that these communitarian authors do not succeed in establishing their case; the concepts of language-use and rule-following have not been shown to presuppose more than one individual.

#### *Chapter 5: Quietists*

In this chapter I shall examine the arguments of two authors—Edward Minar and Martin Gustafson—for what is perhaps the most interesting position in the debate, namely quietism. These authors argue that it would be a mistake to side with either individualism or communitarianism, because there is in fact no determinate answer to the question of whether the concepts of rule-following or language-use presuppose more than one individual. However, I shall argue that their reasoning for this claim is unsound, and moreover that they misunderstand the terms of the debate.

#### *Chapter 6: Summary and conclusions*

This final chapter will tie together the main threads of argument from the previous chapters in order to draw the overall conclusion of the thesis.

## Chapter 1 Kripke's Wittgenstein's communitarian argument

In Saul Kripke's (1982) reading of Wittgenstein, Kripke reads Wittgenstein as first proposing a sceptical argument for the claim that there is no fact that constitutes an individual's meaning something by an expression, and then providing a solution to this sceptical argument that tries to defuse its radical implications while accepting that it cannot be given a 'straight' solution. In what follows, I shall use 'KW' to abbreviate for 'Kripke's Wittgenstein' and refer to the sceptical argument as one provided by 'KW's sceptic'. This distinction between Kripke's reading of Wittgenstein and Wittgenstein himself is necessary given that it is a matter of contention whether Kripke accurately represents Wittgenstein<sup>6</sup>.

This chapter can be broadly characterised in terms of two parts. The first part, from section 1.1 to 1.5, will be an attempt to give an overview of the sceptical argument. Exploration of the secondary literature will be kept to a minimum, except in cases where clarification is necessary, since my focus is on the communitarian implications of KW's solution to the sceptical argument. In the second part of the chapter, section 1.6, I go into detail on KW's 'sceptical' solution to his sceptical argument, and how it leads to a modest communitarian view of language and rules. I shall also consider objections to it from Crispin Wright, Paul Boghossian and Simon Blackburn, and I shall argue that while Wright and Boghossian's objections fail, Blackburn's ultimately succeeds.

### 1.1 The sceptical argument against meaning-facts

I shall first give a brief overview of the sceptical argument as provided by KW's sceptic before going into each premise in more detail:

- (1) If there is a fact that constitutes an individual's meaning something by an expression then this fact can be found under idealised epistemological conditions<sup>7</sup>.
- (2) A fact that constitutes an individual's meaning something by an expression must satisfy two conditions: the extensionality condition and the justificatory<sup>8</sup> condition.

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<sup>6</sup> Influential discussions of Kripke's accuracy in representing Wittgenstein include (Baker & Hacker, 1984; McDowell, 1984, 1993; Wright, 1989a)

<sup>7</sup> The nature of such ideal epistemological conditions will be further elaborated in section 1.3.

- (3) Even under such idealised epistemological conditions, we would not be able to find a fact that can satisfy these two conditions.
- (4) Therefore, there is no fact that constitutes an individual's meaning something by an expression.

## 1.2 *Plus, quus*, and the reach of the sceptical argument

In order to start the sceptical challenge, KW's sceptic initially concedes that some expressions are meaningful so that the sceptic and his interlocutor can be said to converse in a common language. Consequently, KW's sceptic initially restricts his scepticism to *past* meaning ascriptions, rather than *present* ones; our present claims that someone means something by an expression are taken as unproblematic, and the sceptic only challenges claims involving someone previously meaning something by an expression. Consequently, the sceptical challenge can be understood as initially challenging us to come up with a fact that constitutes an individual's meaning something by an expression in the past. The sceptic pursues this line as follows: if there is a fact that constitutes an individual's meaning something by an expression in the past, then this fact should satisfy two conditions, namely the justificatory and extensionality conditions. However, as the sceptic will go on to show, these two conditions cannot be met by any candidate fact that we might propose even under ideal epistemological conditions. Thus, as the sceptic concludes, there is no fact that constitutes an individual's meaning something by an expression in the past.

However, it should be noted that if the sceptic succeeds in vindicating his claim that there is no fact that constitutes an individual's meaning something by an expression in the past, then this implies that there is neither any fact that constitutes an individual's meaning something by an expression in the present. As KW says, "if there can be no fact about which particular function I meant in the *past*, there can be none in the *present* either" (1982, p. 13). The rationale of initially confining the sceptic's query to past meaning ascriptions is simply that it allows him to present his sceptical problem without undermining himself from the outset, for "otherwise, we will be unable to *formulate* our problem" (1982, p. 14).

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<sup>8</sup> Some readers might expect this to be called the 'normativity condition'. I explain my choice to name this the 'justificatory condition' in section 1.4.2.

The example that KW's sceptic uses to argue for his case involves the following meaning ascription: an individual (let's call this person Jones) meant the mathematical operator *plus* by the expression '+' at some time in the past (let's call this time  $t_{\text{past}}$ ). KW's sceptic contends that in order for this meaning ascription to be true there must be some fact or set of facts in the world that would make such an ascription true. Let us call such facts 'meaning-facts', i.e., the facts that make meaning ascriptions true, or in other words the facts that constitute someone's meaning something by an expression.

The sceptic's aim is to show that there are no meaning-facts for the proposition that 'Jones meant plus by 'plus' in the past'; such a proposition is false because there are no facts that can satisfy its truth condition. In other words, the sceptic wants to argue that there are no facts that could satisfy the right hand side of the following truth conditional statement:

'Jones meant *plus* by '+' at  $t_{\text{past}}$ ' is true iff ...<sup>9</sup>

And so, if the sceptic succeeds, then it looks like we are faced with an error theory for ascriptions of meaning: all non-negative atomic ascriptions of meaning are systematically false because there are no facts that can satisfy their truth conditions.

The sceptical argument commences as follows. Let us suppose that Jones has—up until now—only considered addition problems involving numbers smaller than 57, and he now faces the following addition problem: '68+57=?', and wishes to answer it according to how he meant '+' at  $t_{\text{past}}$ . KW's sceptic starts his challenge by asking: what makes it the case that Jones is justified in answering '125', rather than say, '5'? The sceptic's query here is motivated by the acceptance of the following conditional:

(C<sub>plus</sub>) if Jones meant *plus* by '+' at  $t_{\text{past}}$ , and now intends to answer '68+57=?' according to how he meant '+' at  $t_{\text{past}}$ <sup>10</sup>, then he is justified<sup>11</sup> in answering '125'.

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<sup>9</sup> One might be inclined to respond to the sceptic that the right hand side can simply be completed by the fact that Jones meant *plus* by '+' at  $t_{\text{past}}$ , while pointing out to the sceptic that we should not expect to reduce someone's meaning something by an expression into other terms. However, the sceptic has objections to this—see section 1.5, under the ninth and tenth candidate meaning-facts.

<sup>10</sup> Some further background conditions can be mentioned here, such as that Jones intends to respond truthfully, that he remembers his intention correctly, etc. However, for the sake of brevity we may omit them as they do not play a crucial role in the discussion. The focus is on the first conjunct of the antecedent, i.e., 'Jones meant *plus* by '+' at some point in the past'

KW's sceptic treats this conditional as intuitively fundamental for our notion of meaning and so the challenge he puts forth is to find a fact or set of facts that would make the first conjunct of the antecedent, i.e., 'Jones meant *plus* by '+'  $t_{\text{past}}$ ', come out as true. If we are unable to find such a fact then it looks like we are not entitled to say that Jones is justified in answering '125'.

To further dramatize our predicament, KW's sceptic contends that if we are unable to find a fact that constitutes Jones having meant *plus* by '+', then we have no more grounds for asserting that he is justified in answering '125' rather than, say, '5'! This is because we have just as much grounds for claiming that 'Jones meant *quus* by '+' in the past', where *quus* denotes a mathematical function which is symbolised by ' $\oplus$ ' and defined as follows:

$$x \oplus y = x+y, \text{ if } x, y < 57 \\ = 5 \text{ otherwise.}$$

This dramatization also serves another purpose, namely indicating a condition that any meaning-fact for 'Jones meant *plus* by '+' at  $t_{\text{past}}$ ' must satisfy. This condition is that the fact must not be indeterminate with respect to two contrasting meaning ascriptions; this fact should not be compatible with ascribing to Jones that he instead meant *quus* by '+'. This is the extensionality condition which will discuss further in section 1.4.

To clarify the nature of sceptical argument, what is being pursued by the sceptic is not scepticism about arithmetical functions; the sceptic is happy to grant that the *plus* function yields the number 125 when presented with the numbers 68 and 57 as input (1982, p. 13). What is being disputed by the sceptic is whether an individual can mean something by an expression, e.g., whether an individual can mean *plus* by '+' such that his production of the symbol '125' is correct in response to '68 + 57=?'. The sceptic merely attempts to illustrate his contention here by looking at a specific example of how an individual can be said to mean the function *plus* by his expression '+' in the past.

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<sup>11</sup> To be sure, the notion of justification that we are concerned with is justification to the extent that Jones has applied or responded to '+' according to what he intended to mean by it. There may be other factors such as perceptual error (e.g., Jones misreading the addition problem), or moral reasons (e.g., Jones' loved ones are being threatened by a gunman who asks Jones to answer '5') that might compel us to think that, all things considered, Jones is not justified in answering '125'.

To be sure, KW's sceptic could easily use different examples of expressions for his purposes, whether it be predicates or proper names. The overall structure will still be the same—the sceptic will first show that there is a conditional of the form:

( $C_{general}$ ) if a subject  $S$  meant  $F$  (where  $F$  is a particular predicate or proper name, etc.), by expression 'E' at  $t_{past}$  and now intends to apply or respond to 'E' as he meant it at  $t_{past}$ , then he is justified in applying or responding to 'E' in a certain way<sup>12</sup>.

Next, the sceptic will then ask for the fact or set of facts that could satisfy the truth condition of the first conjunct of the antecedent, i.e., 'a subject  $S$  meant  $F$  by expression 'E' at  $t_{past}$ '. If we are unable to find such a fact, then it looks like we are not entitled to claim that  $S$  meant  $F$  or that he is justified in applying or responding to 'E' in any particular way.

What's more, the sceptic can dramatize our predicament by showing that we have just as much grounds for claiming that  $S$  meant something else and so ought to produce any number of other applications or responses that are each incompatible with the claim that he meant  $F$  by 'E' at  $t_{past}$ . In the above example involving *plus*, the sceptic did this by suggesting that Jones might have meant *quus* by '+' at  $t_{past}$  because by hypothesis Jones has up until now only considered addition problems involving numbers smaller than 57, and the *quus* function is co-extensive with the *plus* function until it involves numbers equal to or larger than 57. This manoeuvre can be replicated for other kinds of expressions as well: the sceptic can suggest that a subject  $S$  might have meant another predicate or

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<sup>12</sup> This conditional should not lead us to think that the sceptical challenge is ultimately concerned with the implications of meaning across time. The sceptic is *not* asking me to show how my expression as I meant it in the past has implications for how I now ought to use it in the present. This reading of the sceptical challenge risks construing the sceptic as attacking some sort of trans-temporal notion of correctness conditions (or normativity as some authors might call it), where meaning something by an expression at a particular time imposes constraints for its correct use at a later time. Instead, the sceptic attacks a more intuitive non-trans-temporal notion of correctness conditions: my meaning something by 'E' at any time has constraints for its correct use at that time itself. This implies that if I meant something by an expression 'E' at  $t_{past}$ , then there are constraints on how I should use 'E' at  $t_{past}$ . Thus, the correct understanding of how the sceptic makes use of conditional  $C_{general}$  is as follows: if I meant something by an expression 'E' at  $t_{past}$ , then there are constraints on how I should use 'E' at  $t_{past}$ . But given that I now intend at  $t_{present}$  to mean by 'E' as I did at  $t_{past}$ , then the same constraints on how I should use 'E' at  $t_{past}$  apply now at  $t_{present}$ . Consequently, the sceptic's attempt to show that there are no constraints on how I should use 'E' at  $t_{present}$  should be understood as an attack on the notion that there were constraints on how I should use 'E' at  $t_{past}$  and correspondingly, an attack on the notion that I meant anything by 'E' at  $t_{past}$  in the first place. For an example of how this misinterpretation of KW's sceptic has occurred in the literature, see Boghossian's critique of McGinn in (Boghossian, 1989, pp. 511–514).

proper name, etc. by his expression 'E', because there will always be a hypothetical situation where  $S$  has not yet considered applying 'E'. As such, the sceptic can devise a predicate or proper name (let's call it  $G$ ) whose meaning determines an extension that is identical with  $F$  up until this particular situation, where it now requires an application that is contrary to the meaning of  $F$ .

We can illustrate how the sceptic can construct sceptical scenarios for other kinds of expressions. For predicates, we can consider KW's sceptic's example of *table* and *tabair* (1982, p. 19). Consider the predicate '... is a table'. The sceptic can ask for the fact about me that constitutes my having meant ... *is a table* by my expression '... is a table' at  $t_{\text{past}}$ , suggesting that instead I might have meant ... *is a tabair*, where a *tabair* is anything that is a table not found at the base of the Eiffel Tower, or a chair found there. Suppose that I have never up until now considered applying '... is a table' to objects found at the base of the Eiffel tower. So given that I now intend to mean by '... is a table' according to how I meant it at  $t_{\text{past}}$ , it seems that if I am unable to provide the fact that the sceptic is asking for then I am not justified in pointing at a table found at the base at the Eiffel tower and saying 'This is a table'.

To see how KW's scepticism can apply to proper names, we can turn to McGinn's example of *Kripke* and *Kripnam* (McGinn, 1984, Chapter 4). Suppose that at  $t_{\text{past}}$  I had not considered using the name 'Kripke' beyond a certain time  $t_f$ . The sceptic can then ask what fact about me constitutes my having meant *Kripke* by 'Kripke' at  $t_{\text{past}}$ , suggesting that I might instead have meant *Kripnam*, where if 'Kripke' refers to *Kripnam*, then it applies to Kripke before time  $t_f$ , and to Putnam thereafter. So if I am unable to provide the sceptic with the fact that he is asking me for, then I am not justified in referring to the philosopher Saul Kripke as 'Kripke' after  $t_f$ .

What ought to be clear is that the sceptic's suggestion that a subject  $S$  might have meant  $G$  rather than  $F$  by 'E' is only an illustrative device for the sceptical argument, and should not be regarded as its main thrust. The issue is not merely one of deciding between different hypotheses about what a subject  $S$  means by his expression 'E', for this assumes that there is already a fact that  $S$  means something by 'E' and the problem is simply one of trying to ascertain what  $S$  means by 'E' exactly. This would construe the sceptical argument as merely being epistemological in nature. Rather, the sceptic's suggestion that  $S$  might have meant  $G$  rather than  $F$  should be read as defining a condition of the sceptic's

challenge: in order to refute the sceptic, the fact that we propose to constitute *S* having meant *F* by ‘E’ ought not to be compatible with ascribing to *S* that he instead meant *G* by ‘E’. If we are unable to meet this condition (along with the justificatory condition—see section 1.4 for discussion of both conditions), then it looks like we should concede that there are no such things as meaning-facts. Herein lies the main thrust of the sceptical argument—that there is no fact that constitutes an individual’s meaning something by an expression. Consequently, the aim of the sceptical argument should be construed as arguing for an ontological rather than epistemological conclusion.

Having said that the sceptical argument takes aim at facts concerning what a speaker means, we might pause to wonder whether the argument threatens anything else. In fact, as we shall now observe, the sceptical argument can be generalised to attack facts about mental content. Notably, content-bearing mental states such as thoughts, intentions, beliefs, and wishes are just as susceptible to the sceptical argument as facts about what a speaker means. This is due to the intimate relation between mental content and meaning, where one is often taken to account for the other. As Paul Boghossian explains:

there would appear to be no plausible way to promote a *language-specific* meaning scepticism. On the [Gricean] picture, one cannot threaten linguistic meaning without threatening thought content, since it is from thought that linguistic meaning is held to derive; and on the [Sellarsian] picture, one cannot threaten linguistic meaning without *thereby* threatening thought content, since it is from linguistic meaning that thought content is held to derive. Either way, content and meaning must stand or fall together. (1989, p. 510)

This way of implicating mental content as vulnerable to the sceptical argument also applies to sentence-meaning as well. Given that the sceptical argument thus far might be reckoned as limited to attacking facts about speaker-meaning, i.e., facts that constitute what an individual means by an expression on a particular occasion, the argument can be shown to apply to facts about sentence-meaning as well, i.e., facts about what a sentential expression literally means in a language. This is because of the close relationship between speaker-meaning and sentence-meaning, where one is usually taken to explain the other. Thus, we can paraphrase Boghossian by noting that on the picture where speaker-meaning is foundational, one cannot threaten speaker-meaning without thereby threatening sentence-meaning, since it is from speaker-meaning that sentence-meaning is held to derive. And on the picture where sentence-meaning is primary, one cannot threaten

speaker-meaning without threatening sentence-meaning, since it is from sentence-meaning that speaker-meaning is held to derive. With these clarifications in mind, we can now go through the sceptical argument in more detail.

### 1.3 Premise (1): what facts are we allowed to appeal to and how ideal are the epistemological conditions granted by the sceptic?

Premise (1) states that ‘if there is a fact that constitutes an individual’s meaning something by an expression then this fact can be found under idealised epistemological conditions’. Thus construed, it seems like facts from any domain can be appealed to in order to answer KW’s sceptic’s challenge of finding facts that would constitute an individual’s meaning something by an expression. However, KW’s sceptic seems to initially restrict the domain of facts that we are allowed to appeal to, namely to facts about the individual’s mental and behavioural history<sup>13</sup>:

For the sceptic holds that no fact about my past history—nothing that was ever in my mind, or in my external behaviour—establishes that I meant plus rather than quus. (1982, p. 13)

However, this restriction should not be taken as final, as it is merely a starting point for KW’s sceptic, who initially presumes that facts that constitute what one means should be found amongst the facts about one’s mental or behavioural history. Nevertheless, KW’s sceptic is happy to include facts from any domain for our search for meaning-facts, as his sceptic boldly “claims that an omniscient being, with access to all available facts, still would not find any fact that differentiates between the plus and the quus hypotheses” (1982, p. 39).

Consequently, we should not take KW’s sceptic as taking sides on the debate between semantic internalism and externalism (i.e., the debate on whether the facts that constitute what one means are to be found wholly within the facts about one’s head). To be sure, KW’s sceptic is willing to countenance relational facts about the speaker as well, namely facts about the speaker that involve his relationship to external factors such as his environment or community. For instance, KW’s sceptic considers a proposal that the facts

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<sup>13</sup> In KW’s sceptic’s defence, this restriction is not unprecedented, as his predecessor Quine shares the kind of restriction in play here. However, Quine is more restrictive due to his behaviouristic inclinations and so rejects appeals to introspective mental states whereas KW openly considers them. KW compares his version of scepticism with Quine’s in (Kripke, 1982, pp. 55–57).

that constitute what one means by an expression are the facts about how one's fellow linguistic community members are disposed to apply the expression. But rather than reject this proposal due to its appeal to facts that are external to the speaker, he instead considers it to be open to the same sorts of objections as proposals that appeal to facts about an individual speaker's dispositions (which we will come to discuss in section 1.5):

The theory would assert that 125 is the value of the function meant for given arguments, if and only if '125' is the response nearly everyone would give, given these arguments. Thus the theory would be a social, or community-wide, version of the dispositional theory, and would be open to at least some of the same criticisms of the original form. (1982, p. 111)

The other aspect of premise (1) that deserves some elucidation is the extent of the idealisation of epistemological conditions that is granted by the sceptic to his challenger. To be clear, the sceptic is willing to countenance that an omniscient God would not be able to find a fact that would constitute an individual's meaning something by an expression. The implication of this—to reiterate a point made in the previous section—is that the argument aims at an ontological conclusion rather than an epistemological one<sup>14</sup>, because if even an omniscient God could not find such facts, then this is a compelling reason for rejecting the availability of such facts:

Given, however, that everything in my mental history is compatible both with the conclusion that I meant plus and with the conclusion that I meant quus, it is clear that the sceptical challenge is not really an epistemological one. It purports to show that nothing in my mental history or past behaviour—not even what an omniscient God would know—could establish whether I meant plus or quus. But then it appears to follow that there was no *fact* about me that constituted my having meant plus rather than quus. (Kripke, 1982, p. 21)

#### 1.4 Premise (2): Two conditions for any meaning-constituting fact

KW notes that there are two conditions that any candidate meaning-fact must satisfy in order to qualify as a satisfactory response to his sceptic:

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<sup>14</sup> This is an important clarification to make as some commentators have regarded KW's sceptic as advancing an epistemological thesis. For instance, McGinn reads Kripke as trying to undermine first-person knowledge of meaning, where Kripke is taken as arguing that "we have no account of the nature of our first-person knowledge of meaning—we have no conception of how the primitive, non-experiential state of meaning something is an object of distinctively first-person knowledge" (McGinn, 1984, pp. 160–161).

An answer to the sceptic must satisfy two conditions. First, it must give an account of what fact it is (about my mental state) that constitutes my meaning plus, not quus. But further, there is a condition that any putative candidate for such a fact must satisfy. It must, in some sense, show how I am justified in giving the answer '125' to '68 + 57'. (Kripke, 1982, p. 11)

#### 1.4.1 The extensionality condition

It seems platitudinous to say that the meanings of predicate expressions determine their extensions, i.e., the class of entities to which such expressions correctly apply. For example, the meaning of the predicate expression '... is a car' determines its correct application to certain objects—namely cars, instead of tables.

While not immediately obvious, the meanings of other kinds of expressions can also be said to determine extensions. KW's own example makes use of expressions associated with the mathematical operator of *addition* or *plus* such as '+', 'add', 'plus'. As such, their extensions can be said to be sets of ordered triples that pair up arguments and values with respect to the addition operator. Thus, what we mean by '+' determines an extension that contains sets of ordered triples such as (67, 58, 125), but not (67, 58, 5). This is simply to say, in other words, that if '+' means *plus*, then '+' is correctly applied when writing '67 + 58 = 125', but incorrectly applied when writing '67 + 58 = 5'.

Another example that will be helpful to illustrate is that of expressions for imperatives or rules. For instance, the meanings of 'bring me a glass of water' or 'do not cross this line' determine extensions that contain within them the correct executions of their respective requirements. In other words, the extension of a rule is the set of possible actions that complies with it.

So given that, for a large class of expressions, their meanings can be said to determine extensions, it seems to be a reasonable requirement that meaning-constituting facts must also determine extensions. To illustrate, if there is such a thing as a fact that constitutes someone meaning *plus* by '+', then this fact should also determine that his use of '+' has one particular extension rather than another. More importantly, however, meaning-constituting facts must not just determine extensions, they should also determine extensions that are intuitively plausible. For instance, if there is a fact that constitutes someone meaning *plus* by '+', then this fact should determine that his use of '+' has an

extension that coincides with the extension determined by *plus* rather than *quus*; the extension should contain (67, 58, 125), but not (67, 58, 5).

Thus, we can understand the extensionality condition as follows: if there is a fact about an individual that constitutes his meaning something by an expression, then this fact must determine the extension of that expression in a way that is intuitively plausible.

#### 1.4.2 The justificatory condition<sup>15</sup>

It is also a platitude about meaning that there is a justificatory relationship between what one means by an expression and how one uses that expression, in the sense that what one means by an expression is apt for being appealed to as justification for one's use of an expression. Recall the general conditional that is taken as a given by KW's sceptic:

( $C_{general}$ ) if a subject  $S$  meant  $F$  (where  $F$  is a particular predicate or proper name, etc.) by expression 'E' at  $t_{past}$ , and now intends to apply or respond to 'E' as he meant it at  $t_{past}$ , then he is justified in applying or responding to 'E' in a certain way.

This possibility of justification is due to the fact that meaningful expressions possess conditions for their correct use, and justification in using language consists in showing that one has conformed to such correctness conditions. For example, it seems platitudinous to say that if I mean *plus* by '+' then this claim can be appealed to for justifying my assertion that "67 plus 58 equals 125". In other words I can partially justify my assertion by appealing to the fact that I mean *plus* by '+'. So because there is such a justificatory relationship between what one means by an expression and how one uses that expression, there should also be a corresponding justificatory relationship between the fact that constitutes what one means by an expression and how one uses that expression.

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<sup>15</sup> Some commentators have named this condition the 'normativity condition', perhaps due the fact that when KW deploys this condition against the dispositionalist he says that "the relation of meaning and intention to future action is *normative*, not *descriptive*" (Kripke, 1982, p. 37). I chose to name this condition otherwise for two reasons: firstly it captures the essence of the condition that KW intended to use—being the condition that a meaning-fact must be apt for playing a justificatory role through the possession of correctness conditions, and secondly it is undecided whether KW's construal of the normativity of meaning can really be called as such given that some authors have contended that the normativity of meaning has more import than simply being the possession of correctness conditions. For examples of such discussion, see (Hattiangadi, 2007; Wikforss, 2001).

Thus, we can understand the justificatory condition as follows: if there is a fact about an individual that constitutes his meaning something by an expression, then this fact must be apt for being appealed to as justification for his use of that expression<sup>16</sup>.

### 1.5 Premise (3): the failure to find suitable meaning-facts even under idealised epistemological conditions

So far we have been clarifying the nature of the challenge set forth by KW's sceptic. The sceptic claims that there are no facts that can constitute an individual's meaning something by an expression, because even an omniscient God would be unable to find any facts that can satisfy the extensional and justificatory conditions for meaning-facts. Given this, the sceptic must now discharge his obligation of showing how different candidates for meaning-facts fail to satisfy the extensional and justificatory conditions. As we will now see, the sceptic will consider eleven candidates and argue that they each fail to meet his conditions.

#### I. First candidate: totality of previous behaviour

The first candidate for a meaning fact goes as follows: an individual's meaning something by an expression consists in some (or all) of the facts about his previous behaviour regarding that expression.

However, KW's sceptic is quick to point out that the totality of my previous behaviour will not suffice to constitute what I mean by an expression. This is because there are indefinitely many scenarios where I have not applied the expression, whereas the meaning of my expression determines an extension that outstrips my previous use of that expression. Consequently, this first candidate fact fails to satisfy the extensionality condition.

As KW notes,

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<sup>16</sup> It might be expected that the justificatory condition should be stated more strongly, as also requiring that the meaning-constituting fact possesses the same justification conditions as the meaning of the expression, rather than merely being apt for being appealed to for justification. In other words, it might be expected that the *extensions* of justification between meaning-fact and meaning coincide: that the fact that constitutes my meaning *car* by "car" would justify as correct only those applications that the meaning of *car* would also justify as correct. However, this expectation seems to me to be adequately met with by combining the justificatory condition and the extensionality condition as I have laid them out. Moreover, distinguishing the two conditions in this way allows us to see later on how different responses to KW's sceptic might satisfy one condition but not the other.

One point is crucial to my ‘grasp’ of this rule [of addition]. Although I myself have computed only finitely many sums in the past, the rule determines my answer for indefinitely many new sums that I have never previously considered. This is the whole point of the notion that in learning to add I grasp a rule: my past intentions regarding addition determine a unique answer for indefinitely many new cases in the future. (1982, p. 7)

## II. Second candidate: specific instructions for applying an expression

The next candidate for a meaning-fact runs as follows: an individual’s meaning something by an expression consists in the fact that he gives himself specific instructions on how to apply the expression in various possible scenarios.

This suggestion for a meaning-fact does seem to meet the justificatory condition because specific instructions are apt to be appealed to for justification. For instance, if an individual has given himself the specific instruction to answer ‘125’ to ‘ $68+57=?$ ’ when he learns the meaning of ‘+’, then he can appeal to this fact to justify his response of writing ‘125’ when he encounters ‘ $68+57=?$ ’.

However, where this candidate falters is that it does not meet the extensionality condition, for specific instructions will only ever be related to a finite number of possible scenarios, whereas there are an infinite number of possible scenarios where a meaningful expression could be correctly applied. So although someone might think that meaning *plus* by ‘+’ consists in having given oneself specific instructions for how to answer various sums that one might encounter, one must realise that there will always be sums greater than the ones mentioned in such instructions. KW’s example involved someone who has never considered numbers larger than 125, but the example could easily be modified to involve any larger number. Consequently, giving oneself specific instructions on how to apply an expression does not meet the criteria for a meaning-fact:

After all, [the sceptic] says, if I am now so confident that, as I used the symbol ‘+’, my intention was that ‘ $68+57$ ’ should turn out to denote 125, this cannot be because I explicitly gave myself instructions that 125 is the result of performing the addition in this particular instance. [...] In the past I gave myself only a finite number of examples instantiating this function. (1982, p. 8)

## III. Third candidate: rules for applying expressions

Another candidate for a meaning-fact might go as follows: an individual's meaning something by an expression consists in the fact that he has given himself a general rule.

KW considers such a reply:

Surely I did not merely give myself some finite number of examples, from which I am supposed to extrapolate the whole table [...]. Rather I learned—and internalized instructions for—a *rule* which determines how addition is to be continued. (1982, p. 15)

KW considers someone replying to his sceptic by retorting that the fact that constitutes his meaning *plus* by “plus” is the fact that he has internalised the rule for *counting*. But then the sceptic's query can be repeated at this level, simply by asking for the fact that constitutes his having internalised that rule. In other words, the sceptic can simply ask: what fact about you constitutes your meaning *count* by “count” instead of *quount*, where “to ‘quount’ a heap is to count it in the ordinary sense, unless the heap was formed as the union of two heaps, one of which has 57 or more items, in which case one must automatically give the answer ‘5’” (1982, p. 16)?

The problem with this candidate for a meaning-fact is that it presupposes an answer to the sceptic's challenge simply at a different level, namely at the level of rules. Rules are not exempted from the sceptic's challenge, given that rules and meaningful expressions are analogous<sup>17</sup>: rules possess extensions and justificatory relationships with their executions, just as meaningful expressions possess extensions and justificatory relationships with their applications (recall that in the section 1.4.1 we showed how rules, just like predicate expressions, can be shown to possess extensions). In other words, just as there are actions that accord or fail to accord with rules, there are uses of linguistic expressions that accord or fail to accord with their meanings.

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<sup>17</sup> It is noteworthy to point out that KW's sceptic's reply need only rely on the analogous relationship between rules and linguistic expressions for this objection. KW's sceptic does not need to be committed to the much stronger thesis that to speak a language is to follow rules. If the sceptic accepted this stronger thesis he might instead reply that the appeal to rules is illegitimate because his questioning of the meaning of someone's expression is *ipso facto* his questioning of the rule that someone is following in using that expression. Some commentators have read KW's sceptic as being committed to this stronger thesis. For example, Davidson writes: “Kripke concentrates on the idea of following a rule. According to this idea, to speak a language is to follow rules. [...But] we ought to question the appropriateness of the ordinary concept of following a rule for describing what is involved in speaking a language. [...] the concept of following a rule is not quite appropriate to describe meaning something by saying something” (Davidson, 1992, pp. 259–260).

Hence, if we wish to base meaning-facts on rules we ought to first be sure that there are rule-facts, i.e., facts that constitute an individual having internalised one rule rather than another that can satisfy the extensionality and justificatory conditions as phrased for rules. If we cannot secure the existence of rule-facts then it looks quite precarious to use them as a base for meaning-facts, especially since the same sorts of sceptical considerations that are applied to meaning-facts can be analogously applied to rule-facts.

#### IV. Fourth candidate: internalisation of laws that identify the *plus* function

Another suggestion for answering the sceptic might be that I have internalised certain laws that identify what I mean by my expression, and these laws are incompatible with attributing to my expression some other meaning. For instance:

It might be urged that the quus function is ruled out as an interpretation of ‘+’ because it fails to satisfy some of the laws I accept for ‘+’ (for example, it is not associative; we could have defined it so as not even to be communicative). One might even observe that, on the natural numbers, addition is the only function that satisfies certain laws that I accept—the ‘recursion equations’ for +:  $(x) (x+0=x)$  and  $(x) (y) (x + y' = (x + y)')$  where the stroke or dash indicates successor; these equations are sometimes called a ‘definition’ of addition. (Kripke, 1982, pp. 16–17)

However, the problem with this suggestion is of course its reliance on further laws to answer the sceptic, and so recalls the same difficulties that beset the previous candidate. The sceptic can simply ask for the fact about me that constitutes that I have internalised these laws. As KW’s sceptic replies:

The problem is that the other signs used in these laws (the universal quantifiers, the equality sign) have been applied in only a finite amount of instances, and they can be given non-standard interpretations that will fit non-standard interpretations of ‘+’. Thus for example ‘ $(x)$ ’ might mean for every  $x < h$ , where  $h$  is some upper bound to the instances where universal instantiation has hitherto been applied, and similarly for equality. (1982, pp. 16–17)

#### V. Fifth candidate: occurrent mental states

The next suggestion is that what constitutes my meaning something by an expression is a certain mental state that is available to my consciousness when I use that expression. For

example, when I use the expression ‘green’, I experience a mental image of a green object, and this is what constitutes the meaning of my use of ‘green’:

It has been supposed that all I need to do to determine my use of the word ‘green’ is to have an image, a sample, of green that I bring to mind whenever I apply the word in the future. (Kripke, 1982, p. 20).

However, KW’s sceptic replies that such images alone are indeterminate with respect to how I should apply ‘green’. For I will need to give myself a further general instruction or rule on how to apply the image, such as “apply ‘green’ to all and only those objects that are the same colour as this image”. But of course, I am now relying on a general instruction that I give myself, and this runs into the same problems as the previous two candidates. Consequently, KW’s sceptic can simply run his sceptical argument at the level of these general instructions, as he did with the third candidate:

It is no help the suppose that in the past I stipulated that ‘green’ was to apply to all and only those things ‘of the same color as’ the sample. The sceptic can reinterpret ‘same color’ as same *schmolor*, where things have the same *schmolor* if ... (1982, p. 20).

#### VI. Sixth candidate: dispositions

According to this suggestion for a candidate meaning-fact, the fact that constitutes my meaning something by an expression is the fact that I am disposed to use the expression in a particular way given a certain condition:

According to this response, the fallacy in the argument that no fact about me constitutes my meaning plus lies in the assumption that such a fact must consist in an occurrent mental state. Indeed the sceptical argument shows that my entire occurrent past mental history might have been the same whether I meant plus or quus, but all this shows is that the fact that I meant plus (rather than quus) is to be analyzed *dispositionally*, rather than in terms of occurrent mental states. (Kripke, 1982, p. 22)

The first problem with dispositions is that they do not satisfy the extensionality condition because dispositions are finite in nature, whereas the extension of a meaningful expression is infinite. Consequently, the disposition to apply an expression will be unable

to account for the actual extension of a meaningful expression. As KW's sceptic writes in response,

It is not true, for example, that if queried about the sum of any two numbers, no matter how large, I will reply with their actual sum, for some pairs of numbers are simply too large for my mind—or my brain—to grasp. (1982, pp. 26–27)

The second problem with dispositions is that of accounting for error. KW's sceptic draws our attention to the fact that there are people who are disposed to make systematic mistakes when adding, but we nonetheless credit them with meaning *plus* by '+'. However, the dispositionalist does not seem able to account for this, because he claims that what someone means by an expression is determined by how he is disposed to use that expression. And so by the dispositionalist's lights we must accept that such an individual does not mean *plus*, but some other non-standard function.

Call these two objections the finitude and error objection, respectively. Now one might try to respond to these two objections by suggesting that we should not limit our considerations to our actual dispositions which are of course finite due to the limitations of our minds and bodies. Rather we should consider what we would be disposed to do under ideal conditions where one's brain and health were modified so that one could grasp and process large numbers. This would seem to surmount the finitude objection that dispositions do not meet the extensionality condition.

Moreover, by appealing to such ideal conditions, we draw a distinction between what we are normally disposed to do and what we would be disposed to do under ideal circumstances. This distinction allows us to reply to the error objection, because we can say that what a person means is determined by how he is disposed to use an expression under ideal conditions, and so what he means is not beholden to how he is normally disposed to use that expression.

So does the appeal to ideal dispositions answer the sceptic's challenge? The sceptic's first counter is to raise the epistemological worry that we do not know what we would be disposed to do under such conditions:

But how can we have any confidence in this? How in the world can I tell what would happen if my brain were stuffed with extra brain matter, or if my life were prolonged by some magic elixir? Surely such speculation should be left to

science fiction writers and futurologists. We have no idea what the results of such experiments would be. They might lead me to go insane, even to behave according to a quus-like rule. (1982, p. 27)

Perhaps we can put this epistemological worry aside, because our problem is ontological rather than epistemological. (Presumably an omniscient being would know what the ideal disposition is). But the question still remains whether such an ideal disposition would be able to account for the extension of a meaningful expression. KW's sceptic doubts this, claiming that the only way that an individual's ideal disposition to use '+' has an extension that matches the extension of *addition* is to assume that the individual already means *addition* by '+'. In the sceptic's opinion, the ideal dispositionalist response cannot avoid vicious circularity:

If [the dispositionalist] tries to appeal to my responses under idealized conditions that overcome this finiteness, he will succeed only if the idealization includes a specification that I will still respond, under these idealized conditions, according to the infinite table of the function I actually meant. But then the circularity of the procedure is evident. The idealized dispositions are determinate only because it is already settled which function I meant. (1982, p. 28)

But a disposition to make a mistake is simply a *disposition to give an answer other than the one that accords with the function I meant*. To presuppose this concept in the present discussion is of course viciously circular. If I meant addition, my 'erroneous' actual disposition is to be ignored; if I meant [some non-standard function whose extension corresponds with my disposition to use '+'], it should not be. (1982, p. 30)

However, even if the dispositionalist could answer these objections concerning the satisfaction of the extensionality condition, KW's sceptic believes that a further problem lies ahead. The problem is that dispositions only indicate what I would do, rather than what I would be justified in doing, and so dispositions fall short of satisfying the justificatory condition. As KW's sceptic argues:

Suppose I do mean addition by '+'. What is the relation of this supposition to the question of how I will respond to the problem of '68 + 57'? The dispositionalist gives a *descriptive* account of this relation: if '+' meant addition, then I will answer '125'. But this is not the proper account of the

relation, which is *normative*, not descriptive. The point is *not* that, if I meant addition by '+', I *will* answer '125', but that, if I intend to accord with my past meaning of '+', I *should* answer '125'. Computational error, finiteness of my capacity, and other disturbing factors may lead me not to be *disposed* to respond as I *should*, but if so, I have not acted in accordance with my intentions. The relation of meaning and intention to future action is *normative*, not *descriptive*. (1982, p. 37)

As mentioned in 1.4.2, the sense of 'normative' that we are concerned with here regards conditions of correct use. To say that the relation between meaning *addition* by '+' and answering '125' to '68 + 57' is a normative relation is to say, at the very least, that there are conditions of correct use for '+' given that one means *addition* by it. And because there are correct and incorrect ways of using '+', this implies that there can be scope for justification in using '+'. So to reiterate KW's sceptic, dispositions are not apt to be appealed to for justification because dispositions do not expound what it would be *correct* to do under certain circumstances, only what one *would* do under such circumstances. So even if we could specify ideal conditions under which someone would be disposed to use '+' so that it has an extension that matches the *plus* function, and we were able to specify such conditions without ascribing to the individual possession of determinate content, we would still only be describing what someone would do under such ideal conditions, rather than what it would be correct for him to do.

#### VII. Seventh candidate: appealing to a machine as embodying our dispositions

The next candidate is a variant of the dispositionalist response. According to this suggestion for a candidate meaning-fact, the fact that constitutes my meaning something by an expression is the fact that if a computing machine were to embody my disposition to use an expression, it would use that expression in a certain way. For instance, the fact that I mean *plus* by '+' is the fact that if a machine were to embody my disposition to use '+', it would output only sums for the numbers given as input. As KW writes,

the rule can be embodied in a machine that computes the relevant function. If I build such a machine, it will simply grind out the right answer, in any particular case, to any particular addition problem. The answer that the machine would give is, then, the answer that I intended. (1982, p. 33)

However, KW wants us to be clear by what is suggested by ‘machine’. It could mean, for instance, a program drawn up on paper with the help of symbols. But if this is what is meant by ‘machine’, then the sceptic can redirect his query as to what constitutes the fact that the symbols mean what they do:

Suppose, however, that I am fortunate enough to be such an expert that I have the technical facility required to embody my own intentions in a computing machine, and I state that the machine is *definitive* of my own intentions. Now the word ‘machine’ here may refer to a machine *program* that I draw up, embodying my intentions as to the operation of the machine. Then exactly the same problems arise for the program as for the original symbol ‘+’: the sceptic can feign to believe that the program, too, ought to be interpreted in a quus-like manner. (1982, p. 33)

Alternatively, by ‘machine’, one could instead mean an abstract mathematical object. So in the case of meaning *plus* by ‘+’, the fact that I mean *plus* is given by the fact that I can embody my intention to use ‘+’ in an abstract mathematical object that will always give the sum for any two numbers given as input. However, the problem with this suggestion is that the sceptic can reformulate his query to ask for the fact that constitutes *this* particular abstract mathematical object as the one that faithfully captures my intention to use ‘+’, rather than some other abstract object that instead follows the *quus* function:

To say that a program is not something that I wrote down on paper, but an abstract mathematical object, gets us no further. The problem then simply takes the form of the question: what program (in the sense of abstract mathematical object) corresponds to the ‘program’ I have written on paper (in accordance with the way I meant it)? (1982, p. 33)

On the other hand, by ‘machine’, one could mean “a concrete machine, made of metal and gears (or transistors and wires), and declare that it embodies the function I intend by ‘+’: the values that it gives are the values of the function I intend” (1982, pp. 33–34). However, this suggestion also runs into the same kinds of problems discussed previously for the dispositionalist response, namely relating to finitude and error. The first objection is that machines are finite and so cannot satisfy the extensionality condition because there is a limit to the numbers they can compute, whereas the *plus* function determines an extension that is indefinitely large:

First, the machine is a finite object, accepting only finitely many numbers as input and yielding only finitely many numbers as output—others are simply too big. (1982, p. 34)

The second objection is that concrete machines can malfunction, and if they should do so, the grounds for deciding that they are malfunctioning necessarily reference the intention of its designer. In other words, the grounds for deciding that a concrete machine is no longer computing according to the *plus* rule is decided by referring to the intention of the speaker that the machine is supposed to embody; if the speaker really did intend to compute the sum of  $x$  and  $y$  when faced with “ $x+y=?$ ” then this would be grounds for saying that the machine’s output of ‘5’ to the input of ‘68’ and ‘57’ is a malfunction.

However, the whole point of suggesting a machine as a candidate meaning-fact was to secure a way of determining what an individual speaker meant without having to specify the meaning intentions of the speaker, as that is what is being disputed by the sceptic. But now it looks like we need to specify what the speaker intended to mean by ‘+’, in order to decide if the concrete machine is functioning as it should. So unless we wish to say that concrete machines that embody intentions do not malfunction, it seems that a machine’s ability to determine what a speaker meant by ‘+’ necessarily involves reference to the intentions of the speaker, and the sceptic can simply redirect his query there. As KW writes:

Second, in practice it hardly is likely that I really intend to entrust the values of a function to the operation of a physical machine, even for that finite portion of the function for which the machine can operate. Actual machines can *malfunction*: through melting wires or slipping gears they may give the wrong answer. How is it determined when a malfunction occurs? By reference to the program of the machine, as intended by its designer, not simply by reference to the machine itself. (1982, p. 34)

Whether a machine ever malfunctions and, if so, when, is not a property of the machine itself as a physical object but is well defined only in terms of its program, as stipulated by its designer. Given the program, once again the physical object is superfluous for the purpose of determining what function is meant. Then, as before, the sceptic can concentrate his objections on the program. (1982, p. 35)

VIII. Eighth candidate: appeal to simplest hypothesis

Another response to the sceptic might suggest that the fact that I mean such-and-such by an expression consists in the fact that the hypothesis that I mean such-and-such is the simplest hypothesis as to which meaning my behaviour and mental states manifest. In other words, the fact that I mean *plus* and not *quus* by '+' is given by the fact that out of all the possible hypotheses about what I mean by '+' that are consistent with my behaviour with '+', the hypothesis that I mean *plus* is the simplest one.

However, the fundamental problem with this response is that it construes the sceptic's concern as merely epistemological rather than ontological. To reiterate a point made at the end of section 1.2, the sceptic's concern is not merely one of deciding which of the different hypotheses about what a subject *S* means by his expression 'E' is true, for this assumes that there is already a fact that *S* means something by 'E' and the problem is simply one of trying to ascertain what *S* means by 'E'. Rather, the sceptic is concerned with the ontological claim that there are no facts that constitute what one means by an expression, and the suggestion that we ought to prefer the simplest hypothesis of what one means already begs the question against the sceptic by assuming that there is already a fact about what one means. As KW writes in response,

The real trouble with the appeal to simplicity is more basic. Such an appeal must be based either on a misunderstanding of the sceptical problem, or of the role of simplicity considerations, or both. Recall that the sceptical problem was not merely 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'? If the two competing hypotheses are not genuine hypotheses, not genuine matters of fact, no 'simplicity' considerations will make them so. (1982, p. 38)

It might be worth clarifying the response that KW gives here by examining Wright's rebuttal to it. Wright takes issue with KW's response that the simplicity suggestion begs the question against the sceptic, claiming that instead the sceptic is the one who is guilty of begging the question against the simplicity suggestion. In Wright's eyes, KW's response to the simplicity suggestion relies on the claim that the hypotheses that I mean *plus* or

*quus* are not genuine hypotheses for they do not relate to matters of fact. But this claim is simply a restatement of the conclusion of the sceptical argument itself, and so it is question-begging to appeal to this claim in rebutting a suggestion for a possible meaning-fact. As Wright says, “It is only *after* the skeptical argument has come to its conclusion that the skeptic is entitled to the supposition that there is indeed no such fact of the matter. In the course of the argument, *he* cannot assume as much without begging the question” (Wright, 1984, p. 16).

However, I don’t think that KW begs the question here, simply because his response to the simplicity suggestion does not rely on the claim that Wright says it does. Rather, KW’s response relies on simply reminding us what is at stake in the sceptical argument, namely whether or not the hypotheses that I mean *plus* or *quus* really do relate to matters of fact, and that this is an ontological issue. Given this clarification of what is at stake, appealing to the notion that one hypotheses is simpler than another misconstrues the sceptical problem to be epistemological in nature (‘How do I know what I mean by ‘+’?’), and treats the fundamental ontological question (‘Are there any facts that constitute what I mean by ‘+’?’) to have already been dealt with.

#### IX. Ninth candidate: Irreducible experience with unique qualia

Another suggestion involves questioning the sceptic’s tacit assumption that an individual’s meaning something by an expression is reducible to behaviour or occurrent mental states. Instead, we should accept that an individual’s meaning something by an expression consists in his having a particular experiential state of meaning something by an expression, and resist reducing this experiential state into other terms. Furthermore, given that individuals know with a fair amount of certainty about what they mean by an expression, we should grant that this experience of meaning would have its own special quale that the individual is capable of knowing by introspection. In summary, the suggestion of this candidate meaning fact is that what constitutes my meaning *plus* by ‘+’ is the fact that I possess a particular qualitative state whenever I use ‘+’. As KW writes,

Why not argue that “meaning addition by ‘plus’” denotes an irreducible experience, with its own special *quale*, known directly to each of us by introspection? (Headaches, tickles, nausea are examples of inner states with such *qualia*.) [...] Maybe I appear to be unable to reply [to the sceptic] just because the experience of meaning addition by ‘plus’ is as unique and

irreducible as that of seeing yellow or feeling a headache, while the sceptic's challenge invites me to look for another fact or experience to which this can be reduced. [...] Presumably the experience of *meaning addition* has its own irreducible quality, as does that of feeling a headache. The fact that I mean addition by 'plus' is to be identified with my possession of an experience of this quality. (1982, p. 41)

This candidate meaning-fact has a succinct way of responding to the extensionality condition. The response is simply that it is in the nature of the qualitative state of meaning *plus* that it determines an extension that is in accordance with the *plus* function. This is one of the upshots of taking a non-reductionist stance on what constitutes an individual's meaning something by an expression; given the supposition that meaning *plus* by '+' is an irreducible state, we cannot expect to show how the state determines a particular extension—it simply does so.

However, this candidate meaning-fact does not seem to fare as well in responding to the justificatory condition. A qualitative state on its own is not able to provide a speaker information on what the correct ways of using an expression are. So because a qualitative state does not provide guidance in using an expression, it is hard to see how a speaker can appeal to the qualitative state to justify his use of an expression. So KW writes,

Well, suppose I do in fact feel a certain headache with a very special quality whenever I think of the '+' sign. How on earth would this headache help me figure out whether I ought to answer '125' or '5' when asked about '68+57'? If I think the headache indicates that I ought to say '125', would there be anything about it to refute a sceptic's contention that, on the contrary, it indicates that I should say '5'? (1982, pp. 41–42)

In other words, even if we grant that an individual's meaning *plus* by '+' consists in his having an experiential state with special qualia that somehow determines the extension of *plus*, it remains a mystery how that individual can know how he ought to use that expression or respond to queries in which that expression appears. This epistemological difficulty is at odds with our ordinary conception of meaning, where we would like to believe that people do know how they ought to use the expressions they understand. As KW writes,

If there were a special experience of ‘meaning’ addition by ‘plus’, analogous to a headache, it would not have the properties that a state of meaning addition by ‘plus’ ought to have—it would not tell me what to do in new cases. (1982, p. 43)

The second problem with this candidate meaning-fact is that the presence of qualitative experiences are neither necessary nor sufficient for meaning something by an expression. To see why, KW directs us to Wittgenstein’s discussion (*PI* §§156-178) of the point at which a student who is learning to read becomes a reader—someone who grasps the meaning of the expressions he is taking in. KW points out that we do not judge when a student has mastered reading simply on account of his having a particular qualitative state (so the state isn’t sufficient), and neither do we think that an experienced reader who is reading has a different qualitative state than a beginner who is only pretending to read (so the state isn’t necessary):

Wittgenstein points out that a beginner, who reads by laboriously spelling words out, may have an introspectible experience when he really reads, as opposed to pretending to ‘read’ a passage he has actually memorized in advance; but an experienced reader simply calls the words out and is aware of no special conscious experience of ‘deriving’ the words from the page. The experienced reader may ‘feel’ nothing different when he reads from what the beginner feels, or does not feel, when he pretends. [...] There may or may not be an identifiable moment when the pupil first *felt*, “Now I am reading!” but the presence of such an experience is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for the teacher to judge of him that he is reading. (1982, pp. 45–46)

#### X. Tenth candidate: Sui generis mental state without qualitative character

Related to the previous candidate meaning-fact, it might be otherwise suggested that meaning something by an expression consists in a unique and irreducible state, but one without any qualitative character:

Perhaps we may try to recoup, by arguing that meaning addition by ‘plus’ is a state even more *sui generis* than we have argued before. Perhaps it is simply a primitive state, not to be assimilated to sensations or headaches or any ‘qualitative’ states, nor to be assimilated to dispositions, but a state of a unique kind of its own. (Kripke, 1982, p. 51)

The problem with this suggestion, however, is that it makes the state of meaning something by an expression even more mysterious. For if this state does not have any qualitative character, then how do we have access to it in order to know what we mean? As KW responds,

Such a move may in a sense be irrefutable, and if it is taken in an appropriate way Wittgenstein may even accept it. But it seems desperate: it leaves the nature of this postulated primitive state—the primitive state of ‘meaning addition by “plus”’—completely mysterious. It is not supposed to be an introspectible state, yet we supposedly are aware of it with some fair degree of certainty whenever it occurs. For how else can each of us be confident that he *does*, at present, mean addition by ‘plus’? (1982, p. 51)

This problem of mysteriousness<sup>18</sup> is further compounded by the problem of how an irreducible and non-qualitative state is supposed to be apt to be appealed to for justifying an action in accordance with what one meant. Like the previous candidate, we may suppose that it adequately deals with the extensionality condition by granting that it is in the nature of such a state that it determines an extension that is intuitively plausible. However, it seems to fail just as much—if not worse—in explaining how it can justify an action as being in accord with what one meant.

#### XI. Eleventh Candidate: Grasp of an abstract entity

The final candidate meaning-fact that KW considers is as follows: what constitutes my meaning something by an expression is my grasp of a particular abstract entity. This abstract entity has a mind-independent existence, and is capable of determining the correctness conditions of expressions associated with it in a potentially infinite number of applications. One example on how this suggestion might be put into practice is through Fregean senses, where the sense of the sign ‘+’ is an abstract entity that is grasped by

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<sup>18</sup> The mysteriousness of the state of meaning something by an expression is taken even further by Wright, who sees meaning states as inhabiting two distinct paradigms that are seemingly irreconcilable with each other. Wright notes that, on the one hand, meaning states seem to fit the paradigm of being states of consciousness where an individual has first-person authority in avowing what he means by an expression, e.g., the state of being in pain and exclaiming “I am in pain!”. But on the other hand, meaning states seem to also fit the paradigm of dispositional psychological states, where what constitutes e.g., being courageous, depends on behaviour that the subject has yet to perform and where an individual does not have first-person authority in avowing the possession of such a state. For further discussion, see (Wright, 1989b). An interesting diagnosis of this tension and attempt of dissolving it can be found in (Horwich, 2012), particularly in chapter 4, where Horwich attempts to loosen our grip on the idea that a meaning state fits the paradigm of sensation states.

individuals who understand '+' to mean *plus*, and this sense in turn determines the *addition* function as the referent of the '+' sign:

Frege's analysis of the usage of the plus sign by an individual posits the following four elements: (a) the addition function, an 'objective' mathematical entity; (b) the addition sign '+', a linguistic entity; (c) the 'sense' of this sign, an 'objective' abstract entity like the function; (d) an idea in the individual's mind associated with the sign. The idea is a 'subjective' mental entity, private to each individual and different in different minds. The 'sense', in contrast, is the same for all individuals who use '+' in the standard way. Each individual grasps this sense by virtue of having an appropriate idea in his mind. The 'sense' in turn *determines* the addition function as the *referent* of the '+' sign.

There is again no special problem, for this position, as to the relation between the sense and the referent it determines. It simply is in the nature of a sense to determine a referent. (Kripke, 1982, p. 54)<sup>19</sup>

The obvious problem with this suggestion of course, is that the sceptic can simply ask for the fact about an individual that constitutes his grasp of a sense of a sign; what makes it the case that I have grasped a sense of the sign '+' that determines the *addition* function, rather than the *quaddition* function as the referent of that sign? As KW's sceptic responds,

Ultimately the sceptical problem cannot be evaded, and it arises precisely in the question how the existence in my mind of any mental entity or idea can constitute 'grasping' any particular sense rather than another. The idea in my mind is a finite object: can it not be interpreted as determining a quus function, rather than a plus function? (1982, p. 54)

## 1.6 KW's sceptical solution

To briefly recap, KW's sceptic has argued for the ontological claim that there are no facts that can satisfy the right hand side of truth-conditional statements of the form:

'Subject *S* meant *F* by an expression 'E' at time *t*' is true iff ...

The sceptic's argument for this claim commenced with the requirement that for a fact to satisfy the right hand side of the above truth condition, it needs to satisfy the

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<sup>19</sup> Frege's characterisation of sense of reference that is alluded to by Kripke here can be found in (Frege, 1948).

extensionality and justificatory conditions. However, even under ideal epistemological circumstances in which we have unlimited access to facts about the speaker's behaviour and mental life, we cannot find any fact that can satisfy these conditions, and to prove this point the sceptic considered eleven possible candidate facts under ideal epistemological circumstances and showed that each of them failed to satisfy at least one of these two conditions. Consequently, it looks like we are now faced with an error theory of meaning ascriptions; due to there being no facts that constitute an individual's meaning something by an expression, it seems that all non-negative atomic ascriptions of meaning are systematically false.

To illustrate, the sceptic contends that the meaning ascription 'Jones means *plus* by '+' can only be true if there are facts that make it true; there must be facts that satisfy its truth conditions for it to state a truth. However, the sceptic's task involved showing that there are no facts that can satisfy the truth conditions of any meaning ascription. And so, by the sceptic's lights, such meaning ascriptions emerge as stating falsehoods. We can thus characterise the sceptic's position as the acceptance of the following conditional: 'If meaning ascriptions have truth conditions, then they are systematically false', where the sceptic affirms the antecedent and hence the consequent.

Moreover, not only is KW's sceptic an error theorist about meaning ascriptions, he is also an eliminativist<sup>20</sup>; KW's sceptic believes not only that meaning ascriptions are false but also that the practice of making meaning ascriptions is unjustified. However, if we were to follow through with the sceptic's recommendations then we would have no grounds for saying that anyone means anything by any expression. This eliminativist aspect of the sceptic's position is one that KW regards as "insane and intolerable" and as advocating "the incredible and self-defeating conclusion, that all language is meaningless" (1982, pp. 60, 71).

At this point, it becomes necessary to introduce KW's distinction between straight and sceptical solutions to his sceptical challenge. A straight solution "shows that on closer examination the scepticism proves to be unwarranted; an elusive or complex argument proves the thesis the sceptic doubted" (1982, p. 66). More specifically, a straight solution

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<sup>20</sup> Holding an error theory about a particular discourse does not necessarily commit one to be an eliminativist about that discourse. There might be grounds for maintaining a discourse despite the fact that its assertoric statements are systematically false, e.g., pragmatic benefits. For an example of an eliminativist error theorist, see (Churchland, 1981). For an example of a non-eliminativist one, see (Joyce, 2001).

would “[point] out to the silly sceptic a hidden fact he overlooked, a condition in the world which constitutes my meaning addition by ‘plus’” (1982, p. 69). Given these statements, we can construe a straight solution to KW’s sceptic as a solution that finds some set of facts that can satisfy the conditions for constituting a meaning-fact (namely the extensionality and justificatory conditions), and thus point out the facts that can satisfy the right hand side of truth conditional statements of the form: “Subject *S* meant *F* by an expression ‘*E*’ at time *t* is true iff ...”. In other words, a straight solution would counter the sceptic’s negative assertion that there are no facts that constitute an individual’s meaning something by an expression, by showing that there are such meaning-facts. Given this understanding of a straight solution, the candidates that we considered in the previous section (or at least the ones that did not misunderstand the nature of the sceptical challenge) were candidates for straight solutions—they each tried in some fashion to satisfy the extensionality and justificatory conditions for constituting a meaning-fact. We can thus construe straight solutions as attempts to falsify the conditional ‘If ascriptions of meaning have truth conditions, then they are systematically false’; straight solutions contend that the antecedent of this conditional is true while the consequent is false.

On the other hand, a sceptical solution “begins on the contrary by conceding that the sceptic’s negative assertions are unanswerable. Nevertheless our ordinary practice or belief is justified because—contrary appearances notwithstanding—it need not require the justification the sceptic has shown to be untenable” (Kripke, 1982, p. 66). So there are two parts to a sceptical solution: a concession to the sceptic that his negative assertions are unanswerable, and a demonstration that the belief or practice that is questioned by the sceptic is nevertheless justified because it does not require the justification that the sceptic attacks.

So we shall proceed by first being clear on what exactly is being conceded to the sceptic by KW’s sceptical solution. Kripke states that “Wittgenstein’s sceptical solution concedes to the sceptic that no ‘truth conditions’ or ‘corresponding facts’ in the world exist that make a statement like “Jones, like many of us, means addition by ‘+’” true (1982, p. 86). So what is being conceded to the sceptic is the conclusion of the sceptical argument (the argument indicated in section 1.1), namely that there are no facts that constitute an individual’s meaning something by an expression. In other words, the sceptical solution concedes that there are no facts that can satisfy the right hand side of the truth conditional statement “Subject *S* meant *F* by an expression ‘*E*’ at time *t* is true iff

...’ in virtue of there being no facts that can satisfy the extensionality and justificatory conditions. To be certain, what *isn't* being conceded to the sceptic is his radical conclusion that all language is meaningless<sup>21</sup>. To get to this radical conclusion, as we shall see, the sceptic has to add further considerations to the sceptical argument, such as the notion that the proper analysis of meaning ascriptions is in terms of truth conditions as well as specifying requirements that meaning ascriptions need to satisfy in order to be justified.

We now come to the second part of the sceptical solution. There are a few questions to tackle here, namely, ‘what is the belief or practice that the sceptic asserts is unjustified?’ and ‘what is the justification for said belief or practice that is attacked by the sceptic but is not required for it?’, and ‘what is the alternative form of justification for said belief or practice?’ We shall deal with the first two questions and address the third in the next section.

The answer to the first question is relatively straightforward: the beliefs and practices that the sceptic asserts are unjustified are the beliefs and practices involving meaning ascriptions. Recall that the sceptic is pushing for an eliminativist error theory for meaning ascriptions, where all non-negative statements of attributing meaning to an individual’s expressions are systematically false and so there is no justification for using them.

To answer the second question, the conception of justification for meaning ascriptions that the sceptic holds but that KW in his sceptical solution will dispute is based on the notion that meaning ascriptions purport to state facts and are apt to be analysed in terms of truth conditions. Recall that the very first premise of the sceptical argument states that if there are facts that constitute an individual’s meaning something by an expression, then these facts can be found under ideal epistemological conditions. Both KW and his sceptic

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<sup>21</sup> (Wilson, 1994) has carefully distinguished between two conclusions that KW’s sceptic advances, namely a basic one that KW accepts as part of his sceptical solution and a radical one that KW rejects. I agree with Wilson that the sceptic draws two conclusions, one basic and one more radical, but I disagree with his reading of what constitutes the basic sceptical conclusion. Wilson’s construal of the basic conclusion leaves it open to read the sceptical solution as maintaining a factualist stance for meaning ascriptions, namely a stance that holds that there are facts that make meaning ascriptions true. However, on my reading, the basic sceptical conclusion expressly rejects the availability of any facts that can make a meaning ascription true, and so the sceptical solution’s acceptance of the basic conclusion entails that it cannot maintain a factualist stance. It is beyond the scope of this essay to discuss the nuances of the factualist interpretations of KW and compare them with mine, but for such interpretations see (Byrne, 1996; Davies, 1998; Kusch, 2006). For a critique of such factualist readings of KW, see (Miller, 2010).

accept this premise<sup>22</sup>, but for different reasons. The sceptic accepts this premise under the background assumption that the semantic role of meaning ascriptions is essentially a fact-stating one, and so if they purport to state facts then we can look and see if such facts exist. On the other hand, KW accepts this first premise with an emphasis on its conditional nature: *if* there are facts that constitute an individual's meaning something by an expression, then these facts can be found under ideal epistemological conditions—but it is still open to KW to deny that there are such facts because meaning ascriptions are not fact-stating in the first place. And so KW accepts this conditional but denies its antecedent, because he believes that meaning ascriptions do not purport to state facts. Analogously, we can thus construe the sceptical solution as accepting another conditional that the sceptic accepts, i.e., 'If ascriptions of meaning have truth conditions, then they are systematically false', but denying the antecedent because it disputes the notion that meaning ascriptions have truth conditions in the first place. By doing so, the sceptical solution thereby attempts to avoid an error theory of meaning ascriptions.

The sceptic's assumption that the semantic function of a meaning ascription is to state facts plays a fundamental role in shaping the sceptic's requirements for making justified meaning ascriptions. According to the sceptic, in order for me to be justified in making the meaning ascription 'Jones means *plus* by '+', I must appeal to the existence of a set of facts that can satisfy the right hand side of the truth-conditional 'Jones means *plus* by '+ is true iff ...'. The sceptical argument seeks to demonstrate that there are no such facts, and given the assumption that meaning ascriptions purport to state facts, it would follow that my meaning ascription is both false and unjustified.

However, as we shall see in the next section, KW's sceptical solution disputes this crucial assumption that the semantic function of a meaning ascription is to state facts. By disputing this notion, the way is open for KW to break the link between the claim that there are no facts that correspond to meaning ascriptions and the claim that meaning claims are unjustified. Given this, we can start to see why the sceptical solution is characterised as a sceptical solution: it is *sceptical* because it concedes to the sceptic that there are no facts that can satisfy the right hand side of truth conditional statements of the

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<sup>22</sup> It should be emphasised that KW accepts all of the premises and the conclusion of the sceptical argument (as outlined in section 1.1). If KW's solution had instead pointed out some flaw in the sceptical argument then it would be more appropriate to label the solution as 'straight', given his characterisation of a straight solution as one that "shows that on closer examination the scepticism proves to be unwarranted; an elusive or complex argument proves the thesis the sceptic doubted" (1982, p. 66).

form “A subject *S* meant *F* by an expression ‘*E*’ at time *t*’ is true iff ...’, and it also concedes to the sceptic the conditional that ‘If ascriptions of meaning have truth conditions, then they are systematically false’. However, it is a *solution* because it rejects the antecedent of the aforementioned conditional, and so avoids an error theory of meaning ascriptions. Moreover, it proposes an alternative analysis of meaning ascriptions that yields a different conception of justification, where meaning ascriptions do turn out to be justified. It is to this alternative model of meaning ascriptions that we now turn.

### 1.6.1 From truth conditions to assertability conditions

As mentioned in the previous section, KW wishes to dispute the sceptic’s assumption that the semantic function of a meaning ascription is to state facts. Instead, he proposes that the semantic function of a meaning ascription can be given by stipulating the conditions under which it would be asserted and the role and utility in our lives of asserting it under those conditions. As KW writes,

Wittgenstein replaces the question, “What must be the case for this sentence to be true?” by two others: first, “Under what conditions may this form of words be appropriately asserted (or denied?)”; second, given an answer to the first question, “What is the role, and the utility, in our lives of our practice of asserting (or denying) the form of words under these conditions? (1982, p. 73)

Take for example the meaning ascription I might make of Jones, where I utter ‘Jones means *plus* by ‘+’’. KW contends that my utterance of this statement should not be analysed according to the framework that considers my statement as a fact-stating one, as if there was a fact about Jones that my statement attempted to reflect and in the light of which can be considered true or false. Rather, KW wishes to direct our attention to the fact that I made the utterance because Jones had satisfied my conditions for attributing to an individual that he means *plus* by ‘+’. For instance, I might have observed Jones on a number of different occasions computing large sums and regularly giving the answers that I would be disposed to give were I to be asked to compute the same sums according to the *plus* function. KW calls the conditions that Jones has satisfied my ‘assertability conditions’ for ascribing to an individual that he means *plus* by ‘+’. And to be sure, the assertability conditions for asserting that someone means *plus* by ‘+’ will vary across individuals; my assertability conditions for making this assertion will probably differ from another’s. This is because each individual will have his own set of conditions for ascribing

to someone that he means *plus* by '+', for these conditions are essentially that someone acts according to how the appraiser is disposed or inclined to act with the '+' sign. As KW writes when it comes to someone ascribing to himself that he is following a given rule, he says that "the 'assertability conditions' that license an individual to say that, on a given occasion, he ought to follow his rule this way rather than that, are, ultimately, that he does what he is inclined to do" (1982, p. 88).

It is important to clarify that KW's account of assertability conditions should not be considered as a straight solution to the sceptic. KW should not be confused as proposing that there are truth conditions for the sentence 'Jones means *plus* by '+' and these truth conditions are spelled out in terms of the conditions under which Jones or his linguistic community would be inclined to assert or affirm that sentence. In other words, we should not take KW to be proposing that assertability conditions are to do the job of truth conditions. This would imply that there is a fact that makes Jones answering '125' the right answer to '68+57', namely the fact that this answer would be in agreement with how, say, the majority of Jones' linguistic community would be disposed to answer. But as we saw in section 1.3, KW would consider this construal simply as "a social, or community-wide, version of the dispositional theory, and would be open to at least some of the same criticisms of the original form" (1982, p. 111)<sup>23</sup>.

There is another feature of assertability conditions that might be worth clarifying here. One might read KW to be taking for granted that we each have our own assertability

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<sup>23</sup> One commentator who has attempted to give a straight solution to KW's sceptical argument in terms of communal dispositions is (Bloor, 1997). Bloor writes "A community-wide disposition theory [...] does not however fall into the traps the sceptic set for the individual disposition theory. The central difficulty for the attempt to equate meaning with an individual disposition is its failure to account for normativity. To be disposed is one thing; to be disposed rightly or wrongly is another. [...] By contrast an institution, which arises from the interaction of individual dispositions, does provide a normative basis for the actions of the individuals who are within it" (1997, p. 68). However, one might understandably worry that this characterisation of normativity ultimately reduces right and wrong actions to simply consist in being in or out of step with one's community. This would be in effect equivalent with the early Wright's view that "for the community itself there is no authority, so no standard to meet" (1980, p. 220), and so it would be just as open to the objection that we have dispensed with the notion of objectivity altogether according to which it is the meaning of the expression itself that decides what is the right and wrong way of using it. Such an objection has been made by McDowell: "it is only going out of step with one's fellows that we make room for; not going out of step with a ratification-independent pattern that they follow. So the notion of right and wrong that we have made room for is at best a thin surrogate for what would be required by the intuitive notion of objectivity. That would require the idea of concepts as authoritative" (1984, p. 225). The second worry is that even if we accept Bloor's characterisation of normativity, it seems that a lifelong solitary's use of an expression can possess such normativity in virtue of the fact that we can draw an analogy between his time-slices and the individuals of a community. For such an objection to communitarianism via an appeal to time-slices, see Blackburn's objection to KW's sceptical solution in section 1.6.4.

conditions associated with particular meaning ascriptions. But how can KW simply assume this, given that his sceptic has been arguing that there are no facts that the expression '+' means the *plus* function? Can't the sceptic simply provide an analogue of his argument and ask KW for the fact that constitutes my having certain assertability conditions associated with the sentence 'Jones means *plus* by '+'? Such an objection has been propounded by Wright. Wright reads KW's sceptical solution as being open to a 'revenge' objection from the sceptic that nothing in an individual's mental or behavioural history can determine what assertability conditions he has for asserting 'Jones means *plus* by '+''. As Wright argues,

Could it yesterday have been *true* of a single individual that he associated with the sentence "Jones means addition by '+'" the sort of assertion conditions Kripke sketches? Well, if so, that truth did not consist in any aspect of his finite use of that sentence or of its constituents. [...] But would not any truths concerning the assertion conditions previously associated by somebody with a particular sentence have to be constituted by aspects of his erstwhile behavior and mental life? (1984, p. 770)

To illustrate, suppose that there are two distinct sets of assertability conditions for my assertion that 'Jones means *plus* by '+'', where according to one there is the condition of my observing Jones giving the answer '125' to the sum '68+57', and according to the other there is the condition of my observing Jones giving the answer '5' to that sum. According to Wright's reading, KW is presupposing that there is some fact about me that constitutes my having associated the former assertability condition with the sentence 'Jones means *plus* by '+''. But now can't the sceptic simply reapply his argument and ask for the fact about me that constitutes my having the former condition associated with that sentence rather than the latter? And if I cannot come up with such a fact, even under ideal epistemological conditions, then doesn't that show that I am unjustified in asserting that 'Jones means *plus* by '+'' even if I were to observe Jones giving the answer '125'?

However, this objection arguably rests on a confusion about what assertability conditions are under KW's account. We can presume that Wright is aware of KW's claim that one's assertability conditions for a meaning ascription ultimately involve one's dispositions to use the relevant expressions. But we can see from the above quote that Wright takes the nature of assertability conditions to be that of providing *standards*; in Wright's eyes, the assertability conditions for my asserting 'Jones means *plus* by '+'' are

standards against which my assertions of ‘Jones means *plus* by ‘+’ can deviate from or conform to and so be deemed justified or unjustified. So, in Wright’s thinking, KW is saying that one’s dispositions (or other facts about an individual) can determine such standards of justification for his meaning ascriptions. Now of course we can see the parallels between this picture of assertability conditions with the traditional truth-conditional picture, where it was presumed that in order to mean *plus* by ‘+’, one had to associate the *plus* function, with its standards of correctness, with one’s use of the expression ‘+’. And since the sceptical argument questions what fact determines that association, we can also now ask what fact determines my associating a particular assertability condition rather than another with my asserting ‘Jones means *plus* by ‘+’.

Granted, if this is what KW’s account of assertability conditions consist in, then undoubtedly his sceptical solution would be open to the ‘revenge’ objection by his sceptic as Wright makes it out to be. Arguably, however, this isn’t how KW conceives of assertability conditions. This is because KW never mentions anything that can be taken as claiming that one’s assertability conditions are supposed to function as standards. Recall that KW says that “the ‘assertability conditions’ that license an individual to say that, on a given occasion, he ought to follow his rule this way rather than that, are, ultimately, that he does what he is inclined to do” (1982, p. 88). This implies that as long as one’s meaning ascriptions are the product of one’s dispositions, deviation from one’s assertability conditions for making that ascription is impossible. This claim is also borne out in a case where KW describes the assertability conditions for a meaning ascription in a situation where we consider an individual interacting with others:

From this we can discern rough assertability conditions for such a sentence as “Jones means addition by ‘plus’.” *Jones* is entitled, subject to correction by others, provisionally to say, “I mean addition by ‘plus’,” whenever he has the feeling of confidence—“now I can go on!”—that he can give ‘correct’ responses in new cases; and *he* is entitled, again provisionally and subject to the correction by others, to judge a new response to be ‘correct’ simply because it is the response he is inclined to give. (1982, p. 90)

Here the only deviation that is possible from Jones is his deviation from how others are disposed to respond—in other words, deviation from *their* assertability conditions. He is not capable of deviating from his own assertability conditions: if we factor out the assertability conditions of others then we can say that he is entitled “to judge a new

response to be ‘correct’ simply because it is the response he is inclined to give.” Admittedly, KW never gives an explicit and detailed account of how one’s assertability conditions are constituted, but from the above quotes it is far from obvious that they are constituted as standards and so vulnerable to the same sceptical considerations he is trying to avoid in the sceptical solution.

So assuming that KW does not go for assertability conditions functioning as standards, what are they instead? The alternative seems to be that one’s assertability conditions are little more than *descriptions* of how one is disposed to respond or apply an expression, rather than full-blown *standards* of how one has to apply an expression in order for it to be justified. To be sure, KW does talk about assertability conditions granting licence and entitlement in making meaning ascriptions, but recall that KW also says that as long as an individual does what he is inclined to do in applying an expression, he will always satisfy the licence of his own assertability conditions regarding that expression. If assertability conditions were full-blown standards, then it should be possible for there to be deviation between one’s dispositions to use an expression and whether one applies the expression in a way that is licenced by one’s assertability conditions.

Thus, an individual’s assertability conditions for asserting ‘Jones means *plus* by ‘+’ is determined by how that individual is disposed to use ‘+’. It is because I have the disposition to respond with ‘125’ rather than ‘5’ to the sum of ‘68+57’ that my assertability conditions for asserting ‘Jones means *plus* by ‘+’ have the former condition rather than the latter. In other words, my dispositions—being what they are—determine my assertability conditions independently of my thoughts on what my dispositions are, or my associating them as my assertability conditions.

So in order for Wright’s objection to get off the ground, he will need to claim that there is indeterminacy in how an individual is disposed to apply an expression, such that all the relevant facts about me and my environment do not determine whether I am disposed to answer ‘125’ or ‘5’ to the sum of ‘68+57’. However, recall that the sceptic does grant that there is determinacy in what dispositions an individual has when considering the dispositionalist response to his sceptical argument (see section 1.5.6 above). Thus, if Wright wishes to take this route he must give up his claim to be merely reapplying KW’s sceptical reasoning to the sceptical solution, and instead show himself to be proposing a different kind of scepticism.

Moving on, another aspect of the sceptical solution is its emphasis on recognising the role and utility of making meaning ascriptions in everyday life. Contrary to the idea that their role is essentially a fact-stating one, KW directs us to consider that we make meaning ascriptions to express our confidence that a certain individual will act as we do with respect to certain expressions: “When we pronounce that a child has mastered the rule of addition, we mean that we can entrust him to react as we do in interactions” (1982, p. 93). Moreover, KW observes that our confidence that someone means such-and-such by an expression is earned *not* by there being a fact that we detect in that individual. As KW notes, we should realise that a conditional such as ‘if Jones means *addition* by ‘+’, then if he is asked for ‘68+57’, he will reply ‘125’” “makes it appear that some mental state obtains in Jones that guarantees his performance of particular additions such as ‘68+57’” but this appearance is illusory for it is “just what the sceptical argument denies” (1982, p. 95). In other words, I utter that ‘Jones means *plus* by ‘+’ because he acts with ‘+’ according how I would be disposed to act with it, and so I use my utterance to express my confidence that he will compute sums as I do.

The utility of making meaning ascription follows from its role as so conceived, as it allows individuals to demarcate between individuals who they can be confident with computing sums and those that they are not confident with; I can be confident that Jones, supposing he were a shopkeeper, will compute the sum of my purchases from him in a way I would find agreeable. To put the point more generally, part of the utility of making meaning ascriptions is that they facilitate successful interactions between individuals by allowing them to identify to each other as belonging to the same linguistic community; I would not be able to interact successfully in any substantial way with Jones unless we considered each other to share common ways of using linguistic expressions. As KW notes, “our entire lives depend on countless such interactions, and on the ‘game’ of attributing to others the mastery of certain concepts or rules, thereby showing that we expect them to behave as we do” (1982, p. 93).

We now have the means to answer the question posed in the previous section: how can we justify meaning ascriptions if we abandon conceiving them on a truth conditional model? Recall that as we discussed at the end of section 1.6, under the truth conditional model, my assertion that ‘Jones means *plus* by ‘+’ depended for its justification on the existence of facts that can satisfy the right hand side of the truth conditional ‘Jones means *plus* by ‘+’ is true iff ...’. However, under the assertability conditional model my assertion

can be justified as long as I have found Jones' performance with respect to '+' to be agreeable with how I would be inclined to use it and that I am confident that he will go on to act in this way<sup>24</sup>. In other words, the assertability conditional model does not postulate that the semantic function of meaning ascriptions is a fact-stating one, but they instead serve to express confidence that an individual will act according to how the appraiser would with the expression.

To be sure, my confidence in Jones is not infallible; I have only observed Jones computing a finite number of sums and he may well have a different disposition to compute than I do given large enough sums. However, it is important to note that the most the sceptic can do against my justification is raise epistemic scepticism: it is an epistemic question of whether or not Jones has the same disposition as I do when computing sums. In my justification I appeal to the claim that, as far as I know, Jones has come up with the computations to sums that I too find agreeable. Compare this to the truth conditional model, where the sceptic can raise ontological scepticism for my justification: it is an ontological question of whether there is any fact of the matter whether Jones means *plus* by '+'.

Finally, although KW has said that the justification for a meaning ascription depends on its assertability conditions rather than its truth conditions, some might wonder if truth conditions still play a hidden role in meaning. For isn't a meaning ascription's possession of a certain assertability condition to be explained in terms of truth conditions of meaning?

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<sup>24</sup> My reading of KW's account of justified meaning ascriptions allows KW to sidestep Zalabardo's objection that "it is hard to see which element of Kripke's solution provides this account [of why the justification shown by the sceptic to be untenable is after all not needed.]" (Zalabardo, 1989, p. 40). In Zalabardo's reading of KW's sceptical solution, KW fails to fulfil his obligation of showing that the justification that the sceptic requires for justifying meaning ascriptions is actually not needed. This is because the sceptical solution fails to provide an account of what the meaning that is being ascribed by a meaning ascription consists in: "The fact is that showing that the justification for the concept of meaning that the sceptic undermines is not needed requires an account of what meaning consists in" (*ibid.*). However, what Zalabardo does not seem to appreciate is that believing that a meaning ascription can only be justified by providing an account of what the ascribed meaning consists in is essentially to hold that justification for a meaning ascription must proceed via truth-conditions, and this is what the sceptical solution denies. In my reading of KW's sceptical solution, KW rejects this model of justification and provides an alternative one based on assertability conditions. Thus, KW is not bound to provide an account of what meaning consists in in order to preserve justification for meaning ascriptions. This difference is key to seeing what motivates Zalabardo's reaction to the sceptical argument. Because Zalabardo subscribes to belief that the justification of meaning ascriptions proceeds via truth conditions, his suggestion for how to best respond to KW's sceptic involves what KW would call a communitarian straight solution, according to which the meaning of an expression is fundamentally constituted by communal inclinations: "the notion of correctness generated in the process of communal interaction described by Kripke constitutes the only notion of meaning we are entitled to" (Zalabardo, 1989, p. 42).

In other words, one might think that the explanation for why the meaning ascription ‘Jones means *plus* by ‘+’ has the assertability conditions it does is because these assertability conditions somehow correlate with facts of what it is to mean plus by ‘+’. To provide an analogy, one might think that the reason why observing water falling from the sky is an appropriate assertability condition for asserting ‘It is raining’ is because there are facts that would be the case if ‘It is raining’ were true, and these facts correlate with the observation of water falling from the sky. However, to be sure, the notion that assertability conditions for meaning ascriptions can be explained by reference to their truth conditions contradicts the intentions of the sceptical solution. This is because the sceptical solution expressly rejects the idea that meaning ascriptions possess truth conditions. For this same reason, it would be a misunderstanding of the sceptical solution to think that an individual’s assertability conditions for making a meaning ascription could be justified with respect to meaning-facts about the individual being ascribed.

### 1.6.2 Communitarian implications of the sceptical solution

The sceptical solution replaces the truth conditional model of meaning ascriptions with an assertability conditional model, and according to KW this has dramatic implications for the possibility of a language user who is considered in isolation. As KW writes,

If our considerations so far are correct, the answer is that, if one person is considered in isolation, the notion of a rule as guiding the person who adopts it can have *no* substantive content. There are, we have seen, no truth conditions or facts in virtue of which it can be the case that he accords with his past intentions or not. As long as we regard him as following a rule ‘privately’, so that we pay attention to his justification conditions alone, all we can say is that he is licensed to follow the rule as it strikes him. This is why Wittgenstein says, “To think one is obeying a rule is not to obey a rule; otherwise thinking one was obeying a rule would be the same thing as obeying it. “ [*PI* §202]. (1982, p. 89)

To understand why KW thinks that a person considered in isolation cannot be said to follow rules or mean anything by his expressions, we first need to understand why KW places such importance in the distinction between what seems right to an individual in using an expression, and what the right way of using that expression actually is. We’ll call this distinction the ‘seems right / is right’ distinction for short.

According to KW, the significance of the ‘seems right / is right’ distinction is that it expresses the distinction between performance and correctness in using meaningful expressions. This is clear from one of his responses to the dispositionalist suggestion for a meaning-fact:

Nothing is more contrary to our ordinary view—or Wittgenstein’s—than is the supposition that “whatever is going to seem right to me is right.” [PI §258]. On the contrary, “that only means that here we can’t talk about right” (*ibid.*). A candidate for what constitutes the state of my meaning one function, rather than another, by a given function sign, ought to be such that, whatever in fact I (am disposed to) do, there is a unique thing that I *should* do. Is not the dispositional view simply an equation of performance and correctness? (1982, pp. 23–24)

KW takes the distinction between performance and correctness for an individual using an expression to be necessary for the expression’s meaningfulness. The reason for this relies on a fairly intuitive notion, namely that the meaning of an expression determines the correct (and incorrect) ways for using that expression—in other words its correctness conditions. Given this notion, if we were to obliterate the distinction between performance and correctness in using an expression by equating one with the other, then we threaten the very notion that the expression possesses correctness conditions, and hence meaning, in the first place.

So given that the ‘seems right / is right’ distinction expresses a distinction that seems necessary for the coherence of speaking a language, the question facing us now is: can this distinction be maintained for individuals considered in isolation under the assertability conditional model of meaning ascriptions? KW’s answer to this is ‘no’, and the reason will emerge once we compare how the assertability conditional model maintains the ‘seems right / is right’ distinction in the case of individuals considered in a community and for individuals considered in isolation.

But first, it is worth noting for the sake of comparison how the ‘seems right / is right’ distinction is preserved under the truth conditional model. In short, the truth conditional model maintains the ‘seems right / is right’ distinction by claiming that statements such as the following ones possess different truth conditions:

(A) It seems to Jones that he means *plus* by ‘+’

(B) Jones means *plus* by ‘+’

To show how the truth conditions of (A) and (B) can differ, we might say that (A)’s truth condition is that Jones thinks that he means *plus* by ‘+’. On the other hand, (B)’s truth condition refers to a fact about Jones that constitutes his actually meaning *plus* by ‘+’, regardless of whether he thinks he does. So because (A) and (B) possess different truth conditions, this is what substantiates the ‘seems right/ is right’ distinction under the truth conditional model.

But how does the truth conditional model maintain the ‘seems right/ is right’ distinction for individuals considered in isolation? The answer to this is that, under the truth conditional model, the truth conditions of either (A) or (B) do not usually require reference to other individuals in a linguistic community, given that they consist in facts about the individual speaker or his relation to his environment<sup>25</sup>. So simply considering an individual in isolation makes no difference to the truth conditions of statements such as (A) or (B), and hence it makes no difference to the maintenance of the ‘seems right / is right’ distinction in the case of individual language speakers considered in isolation. However, the conclusion of the sceptical argument is that the truth conditional model of meaning ascriptions must be rejected, and with it its way of maintaining the ‘seems right / is right’ distinction for using expressions. So given that the sceptical solution accepts the conclusion of the sceptical argument, how does it maintain the ‘seems right / is right’ distinction in the case of an individual considered in isolation?

Recall that under the sceptical solution, the propriety of our practice of making meaning ascriptions is to be explained in terms of assertability conditions rather than truth conditions. Consequently, for the sceptical solution to maintain the ‘seems right / is right’ distinction, it must show that statements such as (A) and (B) possess different assertability conditions. However, maintaining the ‘seems right / is right’ distinction is problematic when we consider Jones in isolation from others. This is because in such a case the only assertability conditions we can consider are those of Jones. Given that the assertability conditions of a sentence are the conditions under which an individual would be inclined to assert or affirm that sentence, it would follow that the conditions under which Jones would

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<sup>25</sup> As mentioned in the previous section, KW does acknowledge that there could be communitarian straight solutions that characterise the meaning-fact in terms that relate to how other individuals would use an expression. See (Kripke, 1982, p. 111). On such theories, presumably the ‘seems right / is right’ distinction would collapse in the case of an isolated person.

be inclined to assert either (A) or (B) are identical. This is because there is no scenario where Jones would be inclined to affirm one where he would not be inclined to affirm the other. Thus, the assertability conditions of (A) and (B) will be identical. Due to this, the ‘seems right / is right’ distinction collapses and so the distinction between performance and correctness in using linguistic expressions cannot be maintained in the case of a person considered in isolation. And because this distinction is necessary for making sense of an individual speaking a language, it follows that “if one person is considered in isolation, the notion of a rule as guiding the person who adopts it can have *no* substantive content” (Kripke, 1982, p. 89).

However, when we are no longer confined to a single person’s assertability conditions but have for our consideration the assertability conditions of others, the problem of accounting for the ‘seems right / is right’ distinction is alleviated:

The situation is very different if we widen our gaze from consideration of the rule follower alone and allow ourselves to consider him as interacting with a wider community. Others will then have justification conditions for attributing correct or incorrect rule following to the subject, and these will *not* be simply that the subject’s own authority is unconditionally to be accepted. (Kripke, 1982, p. 89)

So the situation is different when we consider Jones in the context of a linguistic community. In this scenario, there are other people’s assertability conditions that we can take into account, i.e., other people’s conditions under which they would be disposed to assert of Jones that he means *plus* by ‘+’. For instance, assuming that I was a member of Jones’ linguistic community, my assertability conditions for asserting (A) would be that I observe Jones confidently ascribing to himself that he means *plus* by ‘+’, whereas my assertability conditions for asserting (B) would be that I observe Jones providing answers to sums that I would find agreeable. So in addition to Jones’ assertability conditions for (A) and (B), there are now mine for consideration, and my assertability conditions for (A) and (B) are distinct. So given that the assertability conditions for (A) and (B) are now distinct, there is thus a way of maintaining the ‘seems right / is right’ distinction that in turn helps us make sense of Jones as speaking a language.

To be clear, KW’s communitarian thesis does not imply that a lifelong solitary individual cannot speak a language. What KW is claiming is that the concept of a

language-user or rule-follower cannot apply to someone *considered* in isolation. As such, even a full-fledged member of society would fail to speak a language if we considered him in isolation from others. And by this same principle, even a born Crusoe—someone who has always been in physical isolation from others—can be regarded as a language-user by us as long as he is considered to satisfy our assertability conditions for ascribing a language to him. As KW clarifies,

Does this mean that Robinson Crusoe, isolated on an island, cannot be said to follow any rules, no matter what he does? I do not see that this follows. What does follow is that *if* we think of Crusoe as following rules, we are taking him into our community and applying our criteria for rule following to him. The falsity of the private model need not mean that a *physically isolated* individual cannot be said to follow rules; rather that an individual, *considered in isolation* (whether or not he is physically isolated), cannot be said to do so. Remember that Wittgenstein's theory is one of assertability conditions. Our community can assert of any individual that he follows a rule if he passes the tests for rule following applied to any member of the community. (1982, p. 110)

It is because of this allowance that I label KW's position as a modest communitarian view of language, as was defined in the introduction. It is modest because it does not rule out the possibility of a lifelong solitary language-user, but it is communitarian because it places restrictions on who may be considered as a language-user—restrictions that advert to a community. In other words, although KW's position does not rule out a lifelong Crusoe speaking a language, it rules out the possibility of someone *considered in isolation* speaking a language. And this of course contrasts with the individualist conviction that whether we consider someone in isolation or as interacting with a community is irrelevant to his identity as a language-user, for individualists hold that it is not necessary that an individual is considered in relation to others for the concept of a language-user to apply to him<sup>26</sup>.

Consequently, a striking corollary of KW's communitarian thesis is that being a rule-follower or language-user involves subjectivity. Whether or not an individual speaks a language or follows a rule depends on how he is considered; the identity of an individual

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<sup>26</sup> Noam Chomsky (1986, p. 233), among others, has criticised KW's communitarian position as inherently conflicted given that it appears to concede the possibility of a lifelong solitary individual who speaks a language. However, my characterisation of KW's position here allows for this concession while still maintaining its communitarian identity.

as a rule-follower or language-user is affected by the perspective of an appraiser. Given KW's concession to his sceptic, this should not be too surprising. After all, the sceptical argument claims that it is not an objective matter of fact whether someone is a rule-follower, for there are no facts that correspond with such a claim. And so to insist on intuitive grounds "that no one else can affect what I mean by a given symbol ignores the sceptical argument that undermines any such naïve intuition about meaning" (Kripke, 1982, p. 69).

And to further clarify KW's communitarianism, it does not appear to be necessary that the appraiser share the same rules or language as the appraisee for the former to consider the latter as a rule-follower or language-user. In other words, it is not necessary for the two of us to use '+' to mean *addition* in order for you to appraise me as meaning *addition* by some expression I use. Rather, what is necessary is that you possess certain criteria for attributing to someone that he means *addition* by a certain expression. So according to KW, the following can be a legitimate case of meaning ascription: you can observe my use of say, '\*', and after seeing that it matches your use of '+' this leads you to assert 'He means *addition* by \*'. This point, as we shall see in Chapter 4, helps deflect an objection by Davidson.

### 1.6.3 Boghossian's criticism of KW's communitarianism.

It is important to point out that KW's rationale for claiming that we cannot make sense of the 'seems right / is right' distinction in the solitary scenario depends on the claim, as indicated in section 1.6.1, that an individual's assertability conditions ultimately involve his dispositions. It is because an appraiser's assertability conditions for ascribing meaning to an appraisee ultimately involve the appraiser's dispositions that when we consider a person in isolation, where the same individual is both the appraiser and the appraisee, that we are unable to distinguish the assertability conditions for sentences like (A) and (B) because the individual will have the same disposition to affirm or assert either sentence.

However, several authors such as (Boghossian, 1989; Goldfarb, 1985; McGinn, 1984) argue that it is a contingent matter of fact at most that an appraiser's assertability conditions refer to his dispositions. And given that KW is making an impossibility claim, i.e., that it is impossible for an individual who is considered in isolation to speak a language, and that this claim relies on a contingent fact, it thus seems that we should reject

KW's communitarian argument. I believe that this is an important objection to address because it helps clarify KW's communitarian argument as well as his account of assertability conditions. We will thus devote a section to examining Boghossian's objection and showing how it is ultimately unsuccessful.

Boghossian invites us to consider the following question: "whether it is in fact true that, if we accept the sceptical conclusion, we cannot introduce substantive assertability conditions for meaning-attributions that do not advert to the dispositions of a community of speakers?" (1989, pp. 520–521). To be sure, Boghossian is primarily concerned with whether dispositions *simpliciter*, rather than specifically communal dispositions, are necessarily part of an individual's assertability conditions. This is evident when Boghossian asks us to contrast a description of assertability conditions that he thinks KW would approve and an alternative that he proposes for asserting a statement such as (B), i.e., 'Jones means *plus* by '+' (1989, p. 521). So first, Boghossian believes KW would agree with the following assertability condition for (B):

- ( $\alpha$ ) It is warranted to assert of Jones that he means *plus* by '+', provided Jones has responded in reply to most arithmetical queries with the answer that the ascriber is inclined to give.

However, Boghossian asks why we cannot instead have the following assertability condition for (B) that does not advert to anyone's dispositions:

- ( $\beta$ ) It is warranted to assert of Jones that he means *plus* by '+', provided Jones has responded with the *sum* in reply to most arithmetical queries thus far.

Boghossian argues that there is nothing in the sceptical solution that can rule out someone having assertability conditions as in ( $\beta$ ), for KW cannot object that a particular "interpretation of 'sum' is being presupposed in the statement of the condition, for the sceptical solution is not meant to be a *straight* solution to the problem about meaning", and "[n]or is there any problem in the assumption that it is a genuinely factual matter what any two numbers sum to; as Kripke himself repeatedly emphasizes, the sceptical argument does not threaten the existence of *mathematical facts*" (1989, p. 521). And given that ( $\beta$ ) makes no explicit reference to one's inclinations or dispositions, it seems that, if we consider Jones in isolation and describe his assertability conditions as in ( $\beta$ ), the 'seems right / is right' distinction can be maintained. This is because while the assertability

conditions for (A) mention Jones applying ‘+’ in accordance with how he thinks he should apply it, the assertability conditions for (B) mention Jones giving *sums* in response to arithmetical queries. So when Jones writes ‘5’ in response to ‘68+57’, he will satisfy the assertability conditions for asserting (A), but he would not satisfy the conditions for asserting (B).

However, Boghossian is aware of a potential reply on KW’s behalf, and it should be familiar given our response to Wright in 1.6.1. The reply is that KW does not claim that one’s assertability conditions are the product of associating certain conditions with an ascription, for then it would be obvious that one could have an assertability condition that does not refer to dispositions. Rather, one’s assertability conditions are ultimately determined by one’s dispositions. So Boghossian considers the reply that although ( $\beta$ ) might not *mention* dispositions, what matters for KW is that ( $\beta$ ) is parasitic on ( $\alpha$ ), i.e., that assertability conditions are *determined* by the appraiser’s dispositions to respond to arithmetical queries:

Could it perhaps be argued that [( $\beta$ )] is permissible though *parasitic* on the communal assertability conditions Kripke outlines? [...]

According to this account, then, I will judge that Jones means addition by ‘plus’ only if Jones uses ‘plus’ enough times in the same way I am inclined to use it. (1989, pp. 521–522)

Boghossian grants that although it seems acceptable to think that ( $\beta$ ) is parasitic on the appraiser’s dispositions to use ‘+’, a further consideration will show us that dispositions in fact do not play the fundamental role in assertability conditions that KW thinks they do:

It would be absurd for me, under conditions where I had good reason to believe that I had become prone to making arithmetical mistakes—perhaps owing to intoxication or senility or whatever—to insist on agreement with me as a precondition for crediting Jones with mastery of the concept of addition. And this would appear to show that, at a minimum, Kripke’s communitarian account must be modified to read:

[( $\gamma$ )] It is warranted to assert of Jones that he means addition by ‘+’, provided he agrees with my responses to arithmetical queries, *under conditions where I have been a reliable computer of sums.*

What ( $\gamma$ ) indicates is that the appraiser's disposition to use '+' is not fundamental for his assertability condition for asserting that 'Jones means addition by '+'. This is because the appraiser's disposition to respond to arithmetical queries does not play a crucial role in whether ( $\gamma$ ) is satisfied. Instead, what is crucial for the satisfaction of ( $\gamma$ ) is whether Jones provides the sum to arithmetical queries. Thus, ( $\gamma$ ) reveals "that the reference to 'my own responses' is idle, and that the basic assertion condition I accept is just  $[(\beta)]$  (1989, p. 522).

Let us take stock of Boghossian's objection. Boghossian and KW both accept that an appraiser's assertability conditions for a meaning ascription are the conditions under which an appraiser would affirm or assert that meaning ascription. Where Boghossian parts with KW is that Boghossian denies that the appraiser's dispositions always play a crucial role in determining his assertability conditions. This is because it is possible for an appraiser to believe that he should not ascribe meaning to an appraisee despite the appraisee conforming to his dispositions to use an expression. Given this, it appears that we should not take the assertability conditions for a meaning ascription to always be determined by an appraiser's dispositions. And because KW's communitarian argument requires that an appraiser's assertability conditions are always determined by his dispositions, Boghossian thus concludes "that the sceptical solution does not yield a convincing argument against solitary language" (1989, p. 522).

However, let us examine the finer details of Boghossian's objection. First, we can grant that there are cases, as illustrated by Boghossian, where an appraiser believes that he should not ascribe meaning to an appraisee despite the appraisee conforming to his dispositions to use an expression. But on further examination, does this imply that the appraiser's assertability conditions are not determined by his dispositions? Let us suppose that I have good reason to believe that when I am intoxicated I am disposed to answer all arithmetical queries with '5'. Given this awareness, I am led to believe that just because Jones may act in a way that is in agreement with my disposition to use '+' when I am intoxicated, this does not warrant my asserting of him that he means addition by '+'. Does this show that the assertability conditions for my meaning ascription are not determined by my disposition to use '+'? Arguably not, for all that it shows is that my assertability conditions for asserting 'Jones means *addition* by '+' differs from when I am clear-headed and from when I am intoxicated, and that in my clear-headed state I would disapprove of the assertability conditions I would have when intoxicated. Moreover,

contra Boghossian, such assertability conditions can be explained by reference to my dispositions: when I am awake and clear-headed, etc., I am disposed to use ‘+’ in a certain way and this determines one set of assertability conditions for asserting ‘Jones means *addition* by ‘+’’, and when I am intoxicated I have a different disposition to use ‘+’ and this in turn determines a different set of assertability conditions for my asserting ‘Jones means *addition* by ‘+’’.

Boghossian’s objection thus appears to rely on the idea that I cannot have more than one set of assertability conditions for an expression-type. In other words, I cannot have one set of assertability conditions for asserting ‘Jones means *addition* by ‘+’’ when I am clear-headed and another set when I am intoxicated. It is because of this perceived restriction that my one and only set of assertability conditions for asserting that sentence must be captured in a way that makes no reference to my dispositions, given that I have diverging dispositions depending on my state of mind. However, is KW forced to accept this restriction in his account of what assertability conditions are? Nothing that KW has said appears to compel him to do so. Moreover, it would be odd for KW to hold this restriction for assertability conditions, given that he believes that one’s assertability conditions depend on such malleable factors as how confident one feels in ascribing meaning to an individual. Recall that when KW describes the assertability conditions for a meaning ascription in a situation where we consider an individual interacting with others, he describes them as follows:

From this we can discern rough assertability conditions for such a sentence as “Jones means addition by ‘plus’.” *Jones* is entitled, subject to correction by others, provisionally to say, “I mean addition by ‘plus’,” whenever he has the feeling of confidence—“now I can go on!”—that he can give ‘correct’ responses in new cases; and *he* is entitled, again provisionally and subject to the correction by others, to judge a new response to be ‘correct’ simply because it is the response he is inclined to give. (1982, p. 90)

Here KW is claiming that Jones’ assertability conditions for saying ‘I mean addition by ‘plus’’ depend on his feeling confident that he can give correct responses in new cases. But surely whether or not Jones feels confident in a particular application of ‘plus’ is something determined by his dispositions that are in turn influenced by his state of mind—when he is intoxicated he might be confident in answering ‘5’ to ‘what is 68 plus 57?’. Consequently, it seems reasonable to believe that Jones’ assertability conditions may vary

according to his state of mind, and thus that Jones can have more than one set of assertability conditions for saying ‘I mean addition by ‘plus’’.

But even if we grant that someone can have more than one set of assertability conditions, Boghossian might raise the further objection that my awareness and disapproval of how I am disposed to apply ‘+’ when I am intoxicated should somehow make a difference to my assertability conditions for asserting ‘Jones means *addition* by ‘+’’. For how else can we accommodate the intuitive thought, as Boghossian points out, that “it would be absurd of me [...] to insist on agreement with me [when I am intoxicated] as a precondition for crediting Jones with mastery of the concept of addition”? Is there any way that KW can accommodate this intuitive thought? The first thing to note is that it is not clear that such insistence involves absurdity. This is because I might wish to deceive my listeners into thinking that how I act with the ‘+’ sign when I am drunk is actually the right way of doing so when I am actually aware that it isn’t. It thus seems that such insistence more closely resembles hypocrisy than absurdity. So given that my assertability conditions for asserting ‘Jones means *addition* by ‘+’’ differ depending on whether or not I am intoxicated, such hypocrisy can be accounted for as follows: it would be hypocritical of me now (with the assertability conditions I now possess in my clear-headed state for asserting ‘Jones means *addition* by ‘+’’), to insist that Jones must satisfy the assertability conditions I would possess when I am intoxicated for asserting that he means *addition* by ‘+’. To be sure, the hypocrisy of the act consists in the fact that I would be sanctioning criteria for asserting ‘Jones means *addition* by ‘+’’ that I simultaneously disapprove of.

However, there is another intuition that seems to be unaccounted for: given that I am aware of my disposition to use ‘+’ when I am intoxicated, shouldn’t we say that the assertability conditions I possess when I am intoxicated should not count as my *real* or *genuine* assertability conditions? In response to this we must be careful not to forget that assertability conditions are merely descriptive: they only describe the conditions under which someone would affirm or assert a sentence. What this intuition seems to ask for is a certain normative element that allows us to disregard certain assertability conditions as deficient, but unfortunately there is nothing inherent to assertability conditions that enables this. But then, one might ask, could we not have a supplementary principle that allows us to discern which assertability conditions to disavow and which ones to sanction? The prospects look daunting: the principle cannot simply appeal to the fact that in my

clear-headed state I would *disapprove* of the assertability conditions I have in my intoxicated state, for what if in my intoxicated state I would also disapprove of my clear-headed assertability conditions? And nor can we say that our *real* assertability conditions are those that we have under certain conditions e.g., when we are clear-headed, not distracted, etc., for there will be counterexamples where such conditions are satisfied but where we will have different assertability conditions. It thus seems that the assertability conditions we have when intoxicated, distracted, etc., are just as genuine as the assertability conditions we have when we are not, but given that assertability conditions are merely descriptive this should not be too unsettling.

So it seems that Boghossian's attempt to undermine KW's claim that our assertability conditions are determined by our dispositions is ultimately unsuccessful. But even if Boghossian's criticism does not succeed, is it really the case that there is no possible world where one's assertability conditions for making a meaning ascription do *not* involve one's dispositions? If my reading of KW's account of assertability conditions is correct, i.e., that dispositions are involved not simply by being associated or mentioned in the conditions, but that the primary involvement of dispositions is that of determining the conditions themselves, then it seems hard to imagine a possible world where dispositions are not involved in assertability conditions. For given that an individual's assertability conditions for a sentence are the conditions under which he would affirm or assert that sentence, it seems at least intuitively plausible that the individual's dispositions play a necessary role in determining what those conditions are.

#### 1.6.4 Blackburn's criticism of KW's communitarianism

Boghossian's objection is only one of a large number of diverse criticisms directed at KW's communitarian view. In this section we will discuss Blackburn's parity objection, and argue that it is fatal for KW's communitarianism. According to Blackburn, a community is—for all intents and purposes of the sceptical solution—comparable to time-slices of an individual, and so it is unreasonable to believe that an individual considered in isolation faces any more difficulties for being a language-user than an individual considered in the context of a community. In other words, intrasubjectivity can do the job of providing for the 'seems right / is right' distinction just as well as intersubjectivity. A reason for focusing on Blackburn's objection is due to the level of charity it affords KW. According to Blackburn, even if we grant KW the plausibility of the sceptical argument

and solution, it does not follow that we should accept the impossibility of a language-user considered in isolation. Additionally, in later chapters we will discuss other criticisms of KW that take aim at it on the basis of the sceptical argument as well as on intuitive grounds.

Blackburn's argument is as follows. Firstly, recall that KW claims we can make sense of the 'seems right / is right' distinction in someone's meaning something by an expression only if we have more than one person's assertability conditions to consider. According to KW, an individual considered in isolation from others would only provide one person's set of assertability conditions, and so there is no way of maintaining the 'seems right / is right' distinction in his self-ascriptions of meaning, since statements such as (A) and (B) would have identical assertability conditions. And recall that KW's solution to maintaining the 'seems right / is right' distinction is that we need to have for our consideration more than one person's set of assertability conditions for ascribing meaning. There being two persons' sets of assertability conditions, such as that of an appraiser and an appraisee, helps distinguish the assertability conditions for (A) and (B) and thus explain why it might be possible that the appraisee is mistaken in his use of an expression despite his thinking that he is right.

However, Blackburn finds nothing inherently objectionable in viewing an individual as being composed of distinct momentary time-slices, where each time-slice has a numerically distinct set of assertability conditions for ascribing meaning. To provide an illustration, we might first consider a paradigmatic case of two persons. Take the case where Jones' teacher is observing and appraising Jones' use of '+' through his working out various sums. Here we have for our consideration two persons' sets of assertability conditions for asserting both 'It seems to Jones that he means *plus* by '+', and 'Jones means *plus* by '+', namely the teacher's and Jones', and so KW would be happy to accept that we can make sense of the 'seems right / is right' distinction in Jones' *meaning plus* by '+'.<sup>1</sup>

However, there is another case where we might consider Jones in isolation from others, and view him as composed of distinct time-slices, where a time-slice of Jones at noon, i.e., Jones<sub>t=noon</sub>, is attempting to evaluate a series of sums done in his notepad by a previous time-slice of himself, i.e., Jones<sub>t=ten minutes to noon</sub>. Here it seems we have for our consideration two time-slices' sets of assertability conditions for asserting both 'It seems

to Jones<sub>t-ten minutes to noon</sub> that he means *plus* by ‘+’ and ‘Jones<sub>t-ten minutes to noon</sub> means *plus* by ‘+’, namely the assertability conditions of Jones<sub>t-noon</sub> and Jones<sub>t-ten minutes to noon</sub>. Given the similarities between these two cases, shouldn’t KW be happy to accept that we can make sense of the ‘seems right / is right distinction in Jones<sub>t-ten minutes to noon</sub> meaning *plus* by ‘+’? But of course, if KW does accept his then this would imply that KW has to relinquish his communitarian thesis and concede that the concept of a language-user can apply to someone considered in isolation. As Blackburn argues,

The members of a community stand to each other as the momentary time-slices of an individual do. So just as the original skeptic queries what it is for one person-time to be faithful to a rule adopted by a previous person-time, so the public skeptic queries what it is for one person to be faithful to the same rule as that adopted by another. Now if the public skeptic can be by-passed by, in effect, saying that this is what we do—we see each other as mutually understanding the same rule, or dignify or compliment each other as so doing, provided the exposed practices agree well enough, then the private skeptic can be by-passed in the same way. (1984, pp. 294–295)

However, KW was aware of a potential objection along these lines where an individual is claimed to be analogous to a community. Pre-empting such a response, KW contends that they are not analogous, because the inclinations of individuals in a community are distinct and independent of each other, and meaning ascriptions in a community have utility that cannot be mirrored in an intrasubjective case:

As members of the community correct each other, might a given individual correct himself? [...] Ultimately, an individual may simply have conflicting brute inclinations, while the upshot of the matter depends on his will alone. The situation is not analogous to the case of the community, where distinct individuals have distinct and independent wills, and where, when an individual is accepted into the community, others judge that they can rely on his response [...] No corresponding relation between an individual and himself has the same utility. (1982, p. 112 n.88)

It is worth noting that this pre-emptive response by KW appears to go unnoticed by Blackburn when he sets out his parity objection. Moreover, this response finds support in Kusch’s defence of KW, who believes that it effectively nullifies Blackburn’s parity

argument that intrasubjectivity can account for the ‘seems right / is right’ distinction just as well as intersubjectivity<sup>27</sup>:

The main problem is that *intrasubjectivity* can capture normativity only by either falling back on meaning-determinist concepts, or by distorting one’s relationship to oneself. It just is not true that meaning-attributions to myself and for myself have the utility of informing me under what circumstances I can rely on myself. (Kusch, 2006, p. 193)

However, let us take a closer look at KW’s response to the parity argument. The first line of contention is that the assertability conditions of an individual cannot be analogous to assertability conditions of a community. This is because assertability conditions are to be ultimately understood in terms of dispositions, and individuals in a community possess distinct and independent dispositions, whereas the multiple time-slices of an individual do not.

Let us start with the charge that the dispositions of individuals in a community are distinct and that this provides a disanalogy with the intrasubjective case. Firstly, we can grant that in some typical cases, the dispositions of an individual’s time-slices to use an expression are indistinct: presumably my disposition to use the ‘+’ sign at the present moment is identical to my disposition to do so half an hour ago. However, KW’s argument against the possibility of solitary language cannot rely on the contingencies of typical

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<sup>27</sup> Kusch interprets KW’s ‘official road’ to intersubjectivity or communitarianism as susceptible to two fatal problems that we touched upon in our consideration of Boghossian’s objection to KW: “The first problem concerns a tension between two modalities: observing our actually existing, *contingent* assertability conditions, and claiming on the basis of this observation that a private language is *impossible*” (2006, p. 180). The second problem is that it is susceptible to “critics [who] deny that our assertability conditions of meaning ascriptions are communal” (2006, p. 181). As a result of this, Kusch then goes on to develop an ‘improved road’ to communitarianism on KW’s behalf and claims that it can withstand Blackburn’s parity objection. Kusch speaks of the main difference between the official and improved version of KW’s argument as follows: “The improved road can thus grant that our assertability conditions need not always make explicit reference to interpersonal comparison in responses. The only thing that counts is how assertability conditions are used; and we know from the arguments over privacy that they must be used in an *intersubjective setting*” (2006, p. 183). However, it is unclear how Kusch can, in his ‘improved road’ to communitarianism, rely on KW’s arguments over privacy given that these arguments depend on the claim, espoused in the ‘official road’, that assertability conditions involve interpersonal comparisons regarding how one is disposed to act. In other words, Kusch needs to explain how the ‘improved road’ can work despite jettisoning the idea that assertability conditions involve dispositions as well as the ‘official road’ idea that the ‘seems right / is right’ distinction is maintained by comparing two persons’ sets of assertability conditions. This issue aside, my replies against KW’s communitarianism on behalf of Blackburn in this section apply just as much to Kusch’s improved version of KW’s communitarianism, for Kusch makes no adjustments to the notions of assertability conditions being distinct or independent, or to the utility of meaning ascriptions.

situations. Given that it is an argument to the effect that solitary language is impossible, KW needs to claim that there is no possible situation where the dispositions of an individual's time-slices can differ. But on reflection, it would appear that such a claim is quite implausible. My disposition to use '+' varies tremendously when we compare how I am inclined to use it now with how I was inclined to use it when I was learning arithmetic, not to mention how I am inclined to use it under the influence of too much alcohol, when I am distracted, etc. Moreover, it is possible that the meanings of one's words can change over time, such as the word 'gay' coming to include referring to homosexuality instead of just light-heartedness. Given this, it is reasonable to expect that an individual who lived during the transition period when the word slowly acquired new meaning would have time-slices possessing different dispositions to use the word.

Additionally, it is not clear why distinct dispositions are necessary for the 'seems right / is right' distinction in the first place. If it so happens that Jones, through much training and sheer coincidence, comes to have a disposition to apply the '+' sign that is identical as his teacher's, would this imply that the assertability conditions for (A) and (B) are identical when we consider a case of Jones and his teacher working out sums together? It does not seem so: the teacher's assertability conditions for (A) will involve observing Jones confidently giving answers to sums, etc., while her assertability conditions for (B) will involve her observing Jones giving the answers she is disposed to give. So the assertability conditions for (A) and (B) are distinct even if Jones and his teacher have identical dispositions. So given that distinct dispositions are not necessary in the intersubjective case, why are they required in the intrasubjective case?

The next contention to consider is KW's claim that individuals in a community have dispositions that are independent of each other, but that the dispositions of time-slices of an individual do not. It is not clear what KW could mean by dispositions being independent, but presumably he means that the dispositions of an individual are constitutively independent of the dispositions of other individuals; there are facts about what dispositions an individual possesses and these facts have are not necessarily affected by the dispositions of other individuals. So presumably KW believes that the same cannot be said for the time-slices of an individual: the facts about the dispositions of an individual's time-slice have necessary connections with the facts about the dispositions of other time-slices of that individual. However, while it may be true that my current disposition to use the '+' sign is in some ways a development of my previous dispositions

to use '+', it is not obvious that it is necessary for my current disposition that I had the dispositions I did in the past. In other words, there are possible worlds where I have the current disposition to use '+' as I currently and actually do but where the previous dispositions in those possible worlds vary greatly from the ones I previously had in the actual world.

Additionally, it remains unclear why independent dispositions are necessary for distinguishing assertability conditions to begin with. For even if we suppose, for the sake of argument, that the dispositions to use '+' of Jones and his teacher were somehow constitutively dependent on each other, the assertability conditions for (A) and (B) would still differ when we consider Jones and his teacher working out sums together. As mentioned previously, the teacher's assertability conditions for (A) will involve observing Jones confidently giving answers to sums, etc., while the teacher's assertability conditions for (B) will involve her observing Jones giving the answers she is disposed to give. As a result, it does not seem that independent dispositions are necessary in the intersubjective case, and so it looks mysterious why independent dispositions should be demanded in the intrasubjective case.

Given that the criteria of distinct and independent dispositions do not seem to support the disanalogy between time-slices of an individual and members of a community, it seems that KW must resort to the claim that the meaning ascriptions made between time-slices do not have the same *utility* as those made between individuals in a community. To start with, let us remind ourselves what utility meaning ascriptions have between members of a community. As mentioned in section 1.6.1., the role of meaning ascriptions was that they serve to express one's confidence that someone will use an expression in a certain way. Due to this, the utility of meaning ascriptions is that it enables individuals to demarcate between those who they can be confident will act with expressions as they do and those who do not, and thus ultimately facilitate successful interactions between individuals by enabling them to identify or exclude others as belonging to the same linguistic community.

Now can the time-slices of an individual apply meaning ascriptions to each other in a way that exhibits the same utility? It seems not, for it is difficult to conceive how time-slices can ever interact with each other in the way individuals in a community can, and so it is hard to make sense of a need for meaning ascriptions to facilitate successful

interactions between time-slices. Moreover, the time-slices of an individual exist only at a particular time, and so they are unable to continue using expressions in the manner that a distinct individual can. Consequently, it makes little sense to use meaning ascriptions to express confidence that a time-slice will go on to use expressions in a certain way at a later time<sup>28</sup>.

However, how reasonable is it to demand that the meaning ascriptions made between time-slices must have the same utility as those made between individuals in a community? Recall that the sceptical solution's emphasis on the role and utility of meaning ascriptions is that it presented us with another role of meaning ascriptions besides fact-stating, thus freeing us from thinking that their primary semantic function is to describe facts about an individual. Consequently, nothing inherent to the sceptical solution implies that the possible utilities of meaning ascriptions are exhausted by the utility they might provide to individuals in a community. Instead, the only constraint the sceptical solution suggests is that such utility be independent of conceiving meaning ascriptions as factual. Given this point, it seems that we should not demand that the utility of all possible and legitimate uses of meaning ascriptions be similar to that found in a community.

So now the relevant question is, can we make sense of an individual considered in isolation getting any utility out of ascribing meaning to his earlier time-slices? It seems that we can, by considering a case where an individual wishes to track his progress in mastering an expression. To give an example, take the case of Jones<sub>*t-present*</sub> reading through essays he had previously written where he used the expression 'valid argument'. In an early essay a previous version of himself, i.e., Jones<sub>*t-15 years ago*</sub>, thought he was using 'valid argument' correctly, i.e., to mean *valid argument*, but Jones<sub>*t-present*</sub> now finds that what Jones<sub>*t-15 years ago*</sub> meant by that expression was *justified argument*, for back then he had no idea that the conclusion of a valid argument has to be guaranteed if its premises are true. In such a case we can distinguish two sets of assertability conditions for asserting both

'It seems to Jones<sub>*t-15 years ago*</sub> that he means *valid argument* by 'valid argument'', and

'Jones<sub>*t-15 years ago*</sub> means *valid argument* by 'valid argument'',

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<sup>28</sup> To clarify, I would betray a confusion of what time-slices are if I were to say that I am confident that a time-slice of myself ten minutes from now will continue to use '+' as I currently do for the next hour. This is because those actions would not be attributable to the actions of a time-slice of myself ten minutes from now. Rather, I should say that a certain future time-slice of myself has a particular disposition to use '+'.

namely the assertability conditions of  $\text{Jones}_{t-15 \text{ years ago}}$  and  $\text{Jones}_{t\text{-present}}$ . And so, by the lights of the sceptical solution, we can explain the ‘seems right / is right’ distinction for the assertion that ‘ $\text{Jones}_{t-15 \text{ years ago}}$  means *valid argument* by ‘valid argument’ because we have two sets of assertability conditions for it. Moreover, there is an obvious utility for  $\text{Jones}_{t\text{-present}}$  on deciding if he should apply this meaning ascription to his previous self, for through it he is able to discern how his use of ‘valid argument’ has developed over time. He can also apply this same procedure to other previous time-slices of himself, and thus demarcate between those time-slices that use the expression in a way that his current self finds agreeable, and those time-slices that do not.

It might be objected that the utility accorded to meaning-ascriptions used by time-slices is feeble in comparison to those used by individuals in a community. I am inclined to agree with this assessment given that the range of possible things one can do with meaning ascriptions increases dramatically when other people are in the picture. However, the objection must also show that such meagre utility is incompatible with the sceptical solution’s account of meaning ascriptions. But as argued previously, the only constraint on the kinds of utility that the sceptical solution would endorse seem to be that it must not be dependent on regarding the primary semantic function of meaning ascriptions to be fact-stating. To be sure, this constraint is not violated in the case of time-slices as described above. This is because  $\text{Jones}_{t\text{-present}}$ ’s assertion that ‘ $\text{Jones}_{t-15 \text{ years ago}}$  means *valid argument* by ‘valid argument’ does not on its own implicate that there are facts about  $\text{Jones}_{t-15 \text{ years ago}}$  that would make that assertion true or false. And nor does the utility obtained by  $\text{Jones}_{t\text{-present}}$  from making such assertions depend on conceiving that there are such meaning-facts, for such utility can be garnered by describing  $\text{Jones}_{t\text{-present}}$  as expressing his confidence (or lack thereof) of a previous time-slice of himself having the disposition to apply an expression in a way that he would now find agreeable.

However, there is another avenue one might take in objecting to this appeal of time-slices. Intuitively, any account of meaning must make room for its normativity. At minimum, this amounts to the claim that, for the use of a meaningful expression at some time, one must make room for there being conditions of correct use for that expression at that time itself. In the words of Boghossian,

The fact that the expression means something implies, that is, a whole set of normative truths about my behaviour with that expression [...] This is not, as

McGinn would have it, a relation between meaning something by an expression at one time and meaning something by it at some later time; it is rather, a relation between meaning something by it at some time and its *use at that time*. (1989, p. 513)

So in the intersubjective case where we have distinct individuals, it seems we can make sense of there being conditions of correct use at the time of use itself, thus satisfying the minimal notion of normativity outlined by Boghossian. Given that making sense of the ‘seems right / is right’ distinction is necessary for making sense of conditions of correct use, we can have one individual appraising another’s use of an expression at the same time that he uses it, and so we are able to make sense of there being a ‘seems right / is right’ distinction and so allow for conditions of correctness at that time. In contrast, in the intrasubjective case of an individual’s time-slices, we do not seem able to make sense of conditions of correct use at the same time that a time-slice uses an expression. This is because, when I at the present time appraise the use of an expression by a previous time-slice of myself, the ‘seems right / is right’ distinction that emerges is something that emerges at the present time rather than in the past. Hence, it seems that there is no way an appeal to time-slices can make sense of conditions of correct use of an expression at the time of use itself, but only retroactively at a later time. Consequently, it seems that the intrasubjective case cannot satisfy the minimal notion of normativity as outlined above.

However, there is a potential ambiguity at work in this objection. We need to distinguish between the time that we make sense of the ‘seems right / is right’ distinction, and the time that the ‘seems right / is right’ distinction applies to. In the intersubjective case where there are two distinct individuals, both of these times coincide: given that the time when one individual appraises the other is the same time that the other uses an expression, it follows that the time that sense can be made of a ‘seems right / is right’ distinction is the same as the time that the ‘seems right / is right’ distinction applies to. However, this is not so in the intrasubjective case, since the time that a present time-slice appraises a previous time-slice is not the same as the time that the previous time-slice uses the expression. Given this obvious fact, we should therefore also expect a difference between the time that we make sense of the ‘seems right / is right’ distinction, and the time that the ‘seems right / is right’ distinction applies to. In the intrasubjective case, the former is the present time while the latter is the time in the past when the expression was used. Thus, we can say that the intrasubjective case allows us to *presently* make sense of a

‘seems right / is right’ distinction—and hence conditions of correct use—that apply to the use of an expression at a *previous* point in time, and so the intrasubjective case can satisfy the minimal notion of normativity. In other words, distinguishing between the two times allows us to claim that we can *at present* make sense of there being conditions of correct use applicable to the use of an expression *in the past*. To be sure, this does not imply that we can make sense of there being correctness conditions in the use of an expression by a previous time-slice of myself independently of another time-slice (or anyone else) appraising that use. But this is a feature of the sceptical solution itself, since it denies that we can make sense of individuals using expressions meaningfully without considering them in relation to other individuals.

So to conclude this section and chapter, even if we grant the plausibility of KW’s sceptical argument and solution, we can question the communitarian implications of the sceptical solution. KW’s primary objection against solitary language is that we cannot make sense of the ‘seems right / is right’ distinction in the case of an individual considered in isolation, but that we can in the case of an individual considered as part of a community. However, Blackburn’s parity objection shows us that the time-slices of an individual considered in isolation can recuperate the ‘seems right / is right’ distinction in the wake of the sceptical argument just as well as the individual considered in the context of a community. Thus, the sceptical solution is compatible with the individualistic claim that we can make sense of an individual considered in isolation who speaks a language.

## Chapter 2 Pre-KW discussions

As we saw in the previous chapter, KW reached his communitarian thesis via a sceptical solution to a sceptical paradox. KW's claim that an individual considered in isolation cannot follow a rule relies on replacing our intuitive truth-conditional model of meaning and rule-following ascriptions with one based on assertability-conditions. However, not all communitarian theses based on Wittgenstein's considerations are argued for through the resolution of a proposed sceptical paradox. Historically, the earliest proponents of the communitarian reading of Wittgenstein have relied on standalone arguments to defeat the plausibility of a lifelong solitary rule-follower—standalone in the sense that they do not rely on additional arguments that force us to overhaul our ordinary conception of meaning or rule-following. Instead, the early proponents of communitarianism relied on raising doubts about the capacity of a lifelong solitary's capacity to mean anything by his expressions. In this chapter, we will start by examining two such communitarian positions as well as opposing replies to them. One of the purposes of this chapter is to indicate the precariousness of communitarian theses that do not rely on substantive theoretical considerations regarding our conceptions of rule-following and meaning, because such communitarian theses raise questions that only such considerations seem able to answer.

### 2.1 Ayer, Rhees, and Robinson Crusoe

Let us start with the exchange between A. J. Ayer and Rush Rhees. I shall provide a brief account of Ayer's argument for the individualist conception of language only as a means of establishing a context through which we can focus on Rhees' communitarian reply. In "Can there be a private language?" (1954), A. J. Ayer and Rush Rhees engage in one of the earliest dialogues concerning the individualist vs. communitarian conceptions of rule-following prompted by Wittgenstein's thoughts on rule-following and private language. In Ayer's section of the paper, Ayer contends that Wittgenstein's private language argument rests on dubious grounds, and makes a case for the possibility of a lifelong Crusoe who can use a language to not only refer to objects in his environment but also to his private sensations. As a counter to Ayer, Rhees attempts in his section of the paper to refute the possibility of Ayer's Crusoe on the grounds that the very idea of such an individual is unintelligible. To be clear, both Ayer and Rhees take Wittgenstein to deny the possibility of a language-using lifelong Crusoe, and so on this exegetical point they agree. Where the

two authors disagree is on the substantive issue of whether or not such an individual is possible. Ayer thinks that such an individual is possible and that therefore Wittgenstein is wrong in denying it, while Rhees believes that such an individual is impossible and that Wittgenstein's arguments rightly show why.

To start with, Ayer takes up an individualist stance on language: he contends that while there may be psychological reasons for doubting whether a human being can come to have a language by himself, there is nothing unintelligible or self-contradictory about a lifelong solitary individual who uses a language:

Imagine a Robinson Crusoe left alone on his island while still an infant, having not yet learned to speak. Let him, like Romulus and Remus, be nurtured by a wolf, or some other animal, until he can fend for himself; and so let him grow to manhood. He will certainly be able to recognize many things upon the island, in the sense that he adapts his behaviour to them. Is it inconceivable that he should also name them? There may be psychological grounds for doubting whether such a solitary being would in fact invent a language. The development of language, it may be argued, is a social phenomenon. But surely it is not self-contradictory to suppose that someone, uninstructed in the use of any existing language, makes up a language for himself" (1954, p. 70).

So according to Ayer, the possibility of a lifelong Crusoe who uses language to talk about objects in his environment is unproblematic to begin with, and the only remotely contentious issue is whether or not such a Crusoe could use words to describe his private sensations. However, even on this point Ayer does not see much opposition, asking, "But if we allow that our Robinson Crusoe could invent words to describe the flora and fauna of his island, why not allow that he could also invent words to describe his sensations?" (1954, p. 70).

Having sketched Ayer's opposition to communitarian views of language, we now come to Rhees' view. To be sure, Rhees' view also does not concern the physiological or psychological implausibility of a human being coming to maturity on a deserted island who goes on to use meaningful expressions. Rather, Rhees objects to the intelligibility of Ayer's Crusoe; he claims that even if there is such an individual as Ayer describes who uses symbols and expressions in whatever way we may grant, there would be no way to make sense of that individual as speaking a language. In other words, Rhees is objecting to

the conceptual possibility of a lifelong solitary language-user, and so he is advocating the kind of communitarian view this thesis is concerned with.

According to Rhees, the unintelligibility of Ayer's Crusoe is demonstrated by the fact that even if Ayer's Crusoe were to use expressions, we would not be able to make sense of the possibility of his using those expressions mistakenly or inconsistently, or with the same or different meaning:

If [Ayer's Crusoe] should suddenly do something which we should call using these marks entirely differently, it would have no sense to say that he had done anything wrong or anything inconsistent with what he had done before. We could not speak of his using them in the same meaning or in a different meaning. (1954, p. 89)

Let us say that what is necessary to make sense of an individual using an expression mistakenly or inconsistently, or with the same or different meaning, is that the meaning of the expression supplies conditions of correct use of that expression. This claim allows us to account for the platitudes that people can use words correctly or incorrectly, or with the same or different meaning: it is because meaningful expressions possess conditions of correct use that allows for the possibility of using words correctly or incorrectly. Similarly, we can make sense of someone using an expression with a meaning that differs from its conventional one by saying that he ascribes a set of conditions of correct use to that expression that is different from the one it conventionally possesses.

We can add a further necessary condition here that is tacit in Rhees' discussion, namely that an expression is meaningful only if it possesses conditions of correct use<sup>29</sup>. This is because of the aforementioned condition that stated that we can make sense of someone using an expression with a same or different meaning only if the expression possesses conditions of correct use. Consequently, meaningful expressions must possess conditions of correct use, otherwise we get the paradoxical result that an expression can be meaningful despite not being able to make sense of someone using that expression with the same or different meaning.

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<sup>29</sup> To say that an expression is meaningful only if it possesses conditions of correct use is not to say that for every meaningful expression there is a determinate answer as to whether a possible application of that expression is correct or incorrect with respect to its meaning. Conditions of correct use allow for the possibility of vagueness in whether a particular application is correct or incorrect, as long there are at least some applications that are determinately correct or incorrect.

Given this understanding of conditions of correct use for meaningful expressions, we can take Rhees' claim to be that none of a lifelong solitary individual's expressions can possess conditions of correct use. However, Rhees' rationale for this claim is that expressions possess conditions of correct use only if there is a regular way of using those expressions within a community, and that the members of this community mostly agree on certain ways of using those expressions:

Because there is agreement it is possible to say something. When I tell you that the patch on the patient's skin is red, I am not saying that it is called red, but that it *is* red. But I could mean nothing definite by that, and you could not understand me, unless people who have learned the words as we have would agree in calling this red. If people could not be brought to use the word in any regular way [...] then it would not mean anything to say that someone had used the word mistakenly. (1954, p. 79)

It is important to clarify the scope of Rhees' objection to Ayer: Rhees is not limiting his claim merely for expressions that refer to private sensations, while leaving out expressions that refer to external objects. Rather, Rhees is making a claim about expressions *simpliciter*. According to Rhees, it is a necessary condition for any meaningful expression to possess conditions of correctness and this requires that there is communal agreement and regularity in using that expression. As Rhees notes,

The reason is not that others must see what my words refer to. It is just that if my words are to refer to anything they must be understood. They cannot refer at all except in connexion with a use, a use which you learn when you learn what the word means. They cannot refer to anything unless there is a way in which the language is spoken. (1954, p. 84)

We can thus summarise Rhees' objection to the intelligibility of Ayer's Crusoe as follows: an expression can be meaningful only if there are conditions for its correct use, and an expression can have conditions of correct use only if there is regular use of that expression within a community where members of the community agree on a particular way of using it. Consequently, it is because Ayer's Crusoe is never part of a linguistic community that he is unable to meet the aforementioned conditions, and so his expressions do not possess conditions of correct use and are therefore meaningless.

However, even if we grant Rhees that an expression may have conditions of correctness only if there is agreement and regularity in the use of that expression, one may wonder why it is *communal* agreement and regularity that is needed. In other words, what is the relevant difference between the agreement and regularity in the use of an expression within a community compared to the agreement and regularity in the use of an expression by a single isolated individual, such that the former is somehow conducive to the possession of conditions of correct use but the latter is not? Rhees needs to tell us why community makes a difference to an expression possessing meaning whereas a lifelong solitary does not, for without such an account we have no reason for ruling out the intelligibility of Ayer's Crusoe.

Rhees has two points that can be taken as a response to our query. The first is his claim that a meaningful expression must possess what he calls 'independent meaning', and that this can be attained only when the expression is used by different people:

I can mistake the meanings of the words you use, because I might use those words myself. If different people use the same words, then the meanings are independent. I may also take your words in the wrong way. That is rather different, but it is connected with this. He said, "I wonder how long it can last", and she thought he was finding the affair intolerable, whereas he meant the opposite. She knew the meanings of the words he was using, and she could not have misunderstood him in that way unless she had. He might have used the same words to mean what she thought he meant. But he could not have meant either the one or the other unless his words had meant what they do independently; unless they had been the words of a language. I call their meanings "independent", partly because they have to be learned. That is characteristic of language.

Unless the meanings of words were independent—unless they had to be learned—they could not be misunderstood. (1954, pp. 92–93)

To address this response, we first need to get clear on what Rhees means by 'independent meaning'. At first blush, the closest we can come to extracting a definition is the following: if the meaning of a word is independent then it belongs to a language and has to be learnt. Admittedly this is quite vague, but we can make some headway by looking at the clues in the example he provides. The first clue can be found in Rhees' indication that what allows for the possibility of the female protagonist misunderstanding

the male protagonist is the fact that she knew the independent meaning of the words “I wonder how long it can last.” The second clue can be found in Rhees’ claim that what allows for the possibility of the male protagonist meaning either *I am finding the affair intolerable* or—let’s say—*I wish this affair would last*, is the fact that the words “I wonder how long it can last” possess independent meaning.

Given these clues, it seems that by ‘independent meaning’ Rhees is referring to the conventional or literal meaning an expression possesses in a language, where this contrasts with speaker-meaning, namely the meaning intended to be conveyed by the use of an expression by a speaker on a particular occasion. At first glance, this coheres with our extracted definition, which would state that if an expression has conventional meaning then it belongs to a language and has to be learnt by newcomers to the language. Furthermore, this allows us to better understand the first clue: the described case is one where a male protagonist speaker-meant something by ‘I wonder how long this can last’ and this was misunderstood by the female protagonist, and Rhees is claiming that what allows for the possibility of this misunderstanding is the fact that she understood the words in terms of their conventional meaning. Lastly, the second clue can be read as claiming that what allows for the possibility of speaker-meaning is conventional meaning: what allows for the possibility of the male protagonist speaker-meaning either *I am finding the affair intolerable* or *I wish this affair would last* is the fact that the words ‘I wonder how long it can last’ possess conventional meaning. As a result, it seems that we can finally clarify Rhees as claiming that meaningful expressions must possess conventional meaning, and for an expression to possess conventional meaning it is necessary for that expression to be used by different people.

We can leave aside Rhees’ stance on conventional meaning having analytical priority over speaker-meaning, as it does not directly concern the present issue under discussion. What we should be concerned with is whether Rhees has given us an adequate response to our query: what is the relevant difference between the regularity and agreement involved in the use of an expression by a community, compared to that of a lifelong solitary individual, such that the former is conducive to the expression possessing conditions of correctness but the latter is not? In response to this Rhees has claimed that for an expression to possess conventional meaning it must be used by different people, but this does not answer the query so much as lead to its rephrasing: what is the relevant difference between the use of an expression by multiple people, compared to that by a lifelong

solitary individual, such that the former is conducive to the expression possessing conventional meaning but the latter is not? Rhees has not given us a reason for thinking that the regular use of an expression by a lifelong solitary individual cannot possess conventional or literal meaning. Consequently, Rhees' point on independent meaning does not seem to offer much threat to the intelligibility of Ayer's Crusoe.

However, Rhees has a second point that can be taken as a response to our query. He claims that whenever a speaker utters a meaningful expression, there must be the possibility of his either meaning or not meaning what he has uttered, and making sense of this possibility requires taking into account the speaker's relationship with other people:

Now since you have learned the meanings of the expressions you use, it may happen that you do not mean what you say. At least it makes sense to ask of anyone who has spoken whether he meant it. If he does not mean what he says, this is familiar and definite enough, but you cannot describe it by describing what he is doing. You can describe it only by taking into account his relation to other people. In this case it is not simply that various people use the same words, although that is a large part of it. What is important is the special role or part played by the person saying them. That is what his "not meaning them" is. And it is as characteristic and essential for language as independent meanings are. (1954, pp. 93–94)

To illustrate, suppose that someone is pestering me to go for a late-night party. I might reply by uttering "Of course! It's not like I enjoy a good night's sleep anyway". Given that my utterance possesses a meaning that I have learnt, it would make sense to ask whether I meant it according to what I have learnt, or if I meant, say, *There is no way I am going to that party*. Rhees' point here is that given that someone has learned the meaning of an expression, it makes sense to ask whether he means it when he utters that expression, but describing him as either meaning or not meaning what is meant by that expression requires bringing in his relationship with other speakers of the language. However, this point looks related to his previous point about conventional meanings: Rhees has characterised conventional meanings as meanings that are learnt by newcomers to the language, and so to ask whether someone meant an expression as it was learnt is in effect to ask whether the speaker-meaning of his utterance of an expression coincides with that expression's conventional meaning. So in effect, Rhees is now claiming that in order to make sense of whether or not the speaker-meaning of an utterance of an expression coincides with its

conventional meaning, there must be other people who speak the same language to which the expression belongs, and with whom we must take the speaker's relationship into account.

But once again, this does not answer our query so much as rephrase it: What is the relevant difference between the case of an expression that is used by a group of people, compared to that of a lifelong solitary individual, such that the latter allows us to make sense of whether or not the speaker-meaning of an utterance of that expression coincides with its conventional meaning, but the latter does not? Rhee's has only given us a claim that other people are necessary for describing cases where people do or do not mean what they say, but he has not given us any reason for accepting it. As a result, his second point does not do much work either in showing the unintelligibility of Ayer's Crusoe.

We can now summarise this section on the exchange between Ayer and Rhee's on the intelligibility of a lifelong solitary language speaker. Ayer contends that there is nothing unintelligible about a lifelong solitary individual using words to describe his physical environment; we do not seem to be talking nonsense or contradicting ourselves when we propose that a human might come to maturity on a deserted island and use words to describe the flora and fauna. The burden of proof therefore lies with those who would oppose the intelligibility of such a scenario.

Rhee's reply to Ayer takes up this challenge by providing three criteria that any use of expressions must meet to qualify as genuine language use, and indicating that Ayer's Crusoe cannot meet them. The first criterion is that the expressions must possess conditions of correctness, the second is that the expressions must possess conventional meaning, and the third is that we need to be able to make sense of a speaker meaning (or not meaning) what is conventionally meant by an expression should he utter it. However, as we saw, Rhee's does not provide any reason for why a lifelong solitary individual like Ayer's Crusoe cannot meet these criteria. So even if we grant that these criteria are actual criteria for genuine language use, we are left without a reason for why Ayer's Crusoe cannot meet them but an individual embedded in a community can. Thus, Rhee's does not provide a convincing case against the intelligibility of Ayer's Crusoe and correspondingly his case for the communitarian view lacks crucial justification.

## 2.2 Malcolm and the 'seems right / is right' distinction

Let us now turn to a different exchange, between Norman Malcolm on the one hand, and G. P. Baker and P. M. S. Hacker on the other. The exchange between these two parties primarily concern the exegetical issue of what Wittgenstein thought about the intelligibility of a lifelong solitary rule-follower or language user, where both sides marshal passages and quotes from Wittgenstein's writings in support of their interpretation of him. However, while the exegetical issue is interesting in its own right, our main concern here is with the substantive issue of the intelligibility a lifelong solitary rule follower or language user, regardless of what Wittgenstein himself might have thought about it. To this end, we will examine the parts of the exchange between Malcolm and Baker and Hacker that can stand as arguments relating to the substantive debate between communitarian and individualist views of language.

Malcolm claims that "for Wittgenstein the concept of a rule presupposes a community within which a common agreement in actions fixes the meaning of a rule" (1986, p. 175). But it may seem that Malcolm is more concerned with the exegetical question, he also provides some substantive argument in favour of communitarianism. His primary substantive argument can be found in his "Wittgenstein on language and rules" (1989). In the following passage Malcolm argues that it is nonsensical to claim that a lifelong solitary individual could use a language, because his expressions would not possess independent meaning:

To speak a language is to participate in a way of living in which many people are engaged. The language I speak gets its meaning from the common ways of acting and responding of many people. I *take part* in a language in the sense in which I *take part* in a game—which is surely one reason why Wittgenstein compared languages to games. Another reason for this comparison is that in both languages and games there are *rules*. To follow the rules for the use of an expression is nothing other than to use the expression as it is ordinarily used—which is to say, as it is used by those many people who take part in the activities in which the expression is embedded. Thus the meaning of the expression is *independent* of me or of any particular person; and this is why I can use the expression correctly or incorrectly. It has meaning independent of *my* use of it. And this is why there is no sense in the supposition that a forever-

solitary person could know a language, any more than he could buy and sell.  
[...]

The forever-solitary person could make sounds and marks. This would be only what *he* does. The sounds and marks would not have a meaning *independent* of his production of them—which comes to saying that they would *not have meaning* in the sense that words have meaning. (1989, p. 22)

We need to first clarify what Malcolm means when he talks about an expression possessing meaning that is independent of any single individual. At first glance, there seems to be similarities with what Rhee's meant by an expression possessing 'independent meaning', i.e., that it possesses a conventional or literal meaning, because Malcolm indicates that what is necessary for the meaning of expression to be independent is the fact that there is a shared way of using that expression by different individuals. However, Malcolm's characterisation of 'independent meaning' departs from Rhee's in that Malcolm intends the idea of an expression possessing independent meaning to be crucial for why the expression can be used correctly or incorrectly. In other words, where Malcolm differs from Rhee is that Malcolm regards the possession of independent meaning by an expression to be necessary for that expression to possess conditions of correct use.

So by 'independent meaning' Malcolm is referring to something that an expression possesses in virtue of there being a shared way of using that expression, and also what is necessary for the expression to possess conditions of correct use. Given this, it seems we can model Malcolm's characterisation of independent meaning on the 'seems right / is right' distinction in using expressions: Malcolm is in effect claiming that what is necessary for there to be a distinction in content between 'It seems to me that I am using expression *E* correctly' and 'I am actually using expression *E* correctly' is the fact that I am a member of a community that shares a way of using *E*.

There are two reasons for supporting this modelling of Malcolm's notion of independent meaning on the 'seems right / is right' distinction. The first is that the 'seems right / is right' distinction is conceptually linked to the notion of conditions of correct use, for the very concept of correctness implies that simply thinking that one's action is correct does not entail that one is correct. So given that Malcolm thinks that an expression possessing 'independent meaning' is what allows for that expression to have conditions of

correct use, it seems justifiable to take what Malcolm means by an expression possessing independent meaning to be that there is a ‘seems right / is right’ distinction in the use of that expression. The second reason in support of the model is that Malcolm claims that the meaning of an expression must be independent of any particular individual’s use. What this claim seems to suggest is that what counts as the correct use of an expression must not solely depend on any particular application of an expression that an individual might make. So, in other words, the conditions of correct use of an expression transcend any particular application of that expression by an individual, and this coheres with the notion that there is a distinction between it seeming to an individual that a particular application of an expression he has made is correct, and it actually being correct.

So given that we can take Malcolm’s notion of ‘independent meaning’ to be similar to the availability of the ‘seems right / is right’ distinction, we can now structure his argument as follows: For an expression *E* to possess meaning it must possess conditions of correct use. And for *E* to possess conditions of correct use there must be a distinction between it seeming to a speaker that he has used *E* correctly and his actually using *E* correctly, where this distinction involves the former not entailing the latter. However, for this distinction to be available, the speaker must have belonged to a community where there is a shared way of using *E*. Consequently, an individual who has never been a member of a linguistic community cannot be said to use meaningful expressions.

But despite getting some clarity on Malcolm’s argument, it seems that it too falls prey to the same lack of justification that befell Rhees’ argument. Recall that our query for Rhees was for him to supply us with a reason for why an expression can acquire independent meaning only when it is used by multiple people. Here in the case of Malcolm we can direct a similar query: what is the reason for thinking that there can be a ‘seems right / is right’ distinction in using *E* only if there is a shared way of using *E* by multiple individuals? To put the question for Malcolm in another way: what is the relevant difference between a shared way of using an expression and an unshared way of using an expression, such that the former allows for the ‘seems right / is right’ distinction, but the latter does not? Malcolm takes for granted that a shared way of using an expression is necessary for it to possess the distinction, but offers nothing in support of this crucial premise. As a result his communitarian argument suffers from a lack of much needed justification.

### 2.3 Baker and Hacker: replying to Malcolm

In contrast with Malcolm, Baker and Hacker argue that the connection between rule and agreement is that between a rule and *possible*, rather than *actual*, agreement with others. A crucial reason behind this claim is that Baker and Hacker hold that “the genesis of a linguistic ability is irrelevant to its identification. What a person can do is manifest in what he does. The criteria for mastery of a technique lie in its exercise in appropriate circumstances” (1990, p. 174). This idea helps them to distinguish the identification of linguistic ability from the background of teaching and learning that characteristically engenders that ability; in other words, while it is characteristic of language mastery that it is attained through interaction with others, Baker and Hacker believe that such interaction is not conceptually necessary for linguistic mastery. Instead, what is required for language use and rule-following is “regularity which presupposes *recognition of a uniformity* [... and] an array of circumambient normative practices of activities, e.g., of correcting mistakes, of checking what one has done for correctness against a standard” (1990, p. 176), and Baker and Hacker argue that it is conceptually possible for a lifelong solitary individual to satisfy such criteria and therefore be identified as a rule-follower.

Baker and Hacker seek to undermine Malcolm’s communitarian view by using the example of Defoe’s Crusoe, an individual who is shipwrecked on an island after being raised as an English speaker in society. Baker and Hacker point out that we would uncontentionally attribute mastery of a language to Defoe’s Crusoe despite the fact that he is alone on the island, and note that even “Malcolm concedes that Defoe’s Crusoe can follow rules” (1990, p. 176). But now Baker and Hacker present a problem for Malcolm, where Malcolm has to account for his willingness to concede that Defoe’s Crusoe can follow rules and speak a language while maintaining his view that expressions must be shared in order to be meaningful. Given that Crusoe is alone on the island it follows that he has no one to be in agreement with when he follows rules or speaks English to himself. So, Malcolm cannot claim that the expressions that Defoe’s Crusoe uses are meaningful because those expressions are actually shared—after all, Crusoe might invent new words to describe his environment, or all the other English speakers on the planet might go extinct once Crusoe arrived on the island so that his present understanding of English expressions would not be shared by anyone else. As Baker and Hacker contend, “Robinson Crusoe will continue speaking English whether or not there are still English

speakers elsewhere. If the English speaking peoples are wiped out by a catastrophe, Crusoe's utterances do not thereby become gibberish" (1990, p. 177). So in addition to our query of why Malcolm thinks that an expression must be shared in order to possess conditions of correctness, Baker and Hacker raise the additional query of how this thought can be squared with the concession that an individual like Defoe's Crusoe can still speak a language despite his expressions not being shared by others.

Baker and Hacker acknowledge that one possible way for Malcolm to answer their query is for Malcolm to suggest that what makes the difference for Defoe's Crusoe is the idea that Crusoe was brought up in a community of language users. In other words, Malcolm might try to answer Baker and Hacker's challenge by appealing, not to the idea that expressions must be shared in order to be meaningful, but to the idea that someone can use an expression meaningfully only if he learnt how to use shared expressions. This would allow Defoe's Crusoe to still count as a language user, for he was brought up to speak English in a community of English speakers, but it would rule out a lifelong solitary individual from being a language speaker because he has not interacted with anyone. However, Baker and Hacker point out that this runs counter to the idea they proposed earlier, that the genesis of an ability is irrelevant to its identification:

But, Malcolm will reply, these *were* social practices, and were learnt from others. That is true, but it only constitutes an objection so far as it presupposes the dubious principle that the genesis of an ability is relevant to the determination or identification of the current ability. (1990, p. 178)

Malcolm would thus have to reject the idea that the genesis of an ability is irrelevant to its identification in order to explain his conviction that Defoe's Crusoe speaks a language but a lifelong solitary one does not. However, in anticipation of this manoeuvre, Baker and Hacker rely on the claim that Wittgenstein himself accepts the idea that the genesis of an ability is irrelevant to its identification (1990, pp. 173–174), and so if Malcolm wishes to deny this notion then he would have to surrender his claim that he is representing Wittgenstein in his denial of the possibility of a lifelong solitary language user.

It should be made clear that Baker and Hacker are relying on an exegetical point to challenge Malcolm, and so this point holds very little currency for those who are more interested in the substantive issue rather than the exegetical one. So are there good reasons for accepting the idea that the genesis of linguistic ability is irrelevant to its identification?

To be sure, we should be careful to distinguish between an epistemological and constitutive issue here. The issue is not whether we can know that an individual speaks a language if we do not know how he acquired it. Rather, the issue is whether an individual can be a language-user regardless of how he acquired his linguistic ability, i.e., whether it makes a difference that he acquired it through a sheer miracle or through learning it from others. Here it seems that whether or not one subscribes to the general idea that the genesis of a linguistic ability is relevant to its identification, it is clear that if the communitarian wishes to adopt it then he has the larger burden of proof. For not only must the communitarian provide reasons for this general idea, but he must provide further reasons for the specific idea that the genesis of linguistic ability must involve more than one individual.

In response to this, a communitarian might ask: 'But doesn't the individualist who accepts the general idea also need to provide reasons for the specific idea that the genesis does *not* require more than one individual?' The answer to this is that such reasons are required from the individualist only after the communitarian has given plausible reasons for his own view. This is because of the nature of the burden of proof in this debate. As mentioned in the introduction, most competent users of the concept of a language-user would accept on intuitive grounds the claim that the concept does not presuppose more than a single individual. And given that in issues about the proper understanding of a concept we accord greater authority to the intuitions of competent users of that concept rather than to philosophical arguments about it, communitarians must be the first to provide substantive reasons for their view. So, in other words, an individualist can accept that the genesis of a linguistic ability is relevant to its identification, but maintain that this does not imply giving up individualism until the communitarian can show that the genesis necessarily involves reference to another individual.

But regardless of whether one accepts the idea that the genesis of an ability is irrelevant to its identification, we can appreciate that there is a standing challenge for proponents of communitarianism to explain the case of Defoe's Crusoe. Communitarians must make their reasons for rejecting the intelligibility of a lifelong solitary using a language consistent with the possibility of Defoe's Crusoe speaking a language despite his expressions not being shared by others. The other alternative, namely that of also rejecting the possibility of Defoe's Crusoe speaking a language, would be too radical and counterintuitive to accept without an extremely persuasive argument.

To conclude this chapter, the pre-KW communitarian arguments considered here fall easily for want of crucial justification. Although Rhee and Malcolm attempt to raise doubts about the intelligibility of a lifelong solitary language-user, they do not give reasons for key premises. Rhee does not supply us with a reason for why an expression must be used by multiple people in order for it to possess conventional meaning, and Malcolm does not explain why there must be a shared practice of using an expression for there to be a ‘seems right / is right’ distinction in using that expression. Consequently, neither Rhee nor Malcolm have the means of blunting the claim that, just as there are facts that make it the case that you and I speak a language, surely there is no way of ruling out the possibility that that same fact could obtain in the case of a lifelong solitary individual and thus make it the case that he speaks a language. In other words, one could take Baker and Hacker’s emphasis on “regularity which presupposes *recognition of a uniformity* [... and] an array of circumambient normative practices of activities” (1990, p. 176) as a fact that determines whether or not one is a rule-follower, and Rhee and Malcolm would be at a loss of explaining why such a fact could not obtain in a lifelong solitary case.

Rhee’s and Malcolm’s position contrasts with KW’s communitarian view that we considered in the previous chapter, where KW *does* provide an explanation for why an individual needs to be considered in the context of a community in order to allow for the ‘seems right / is right’ distinction. As indicated, this explanation involves overhauling our intuitive truth-conditional conception of meaning and replacing it with an assertability-conditional one, and then showing from this that there is no ‘seems right / is right’ distinction in the case of an individual considered in isolation because the assertability conditions for asserting what seems right to him are identical to asserting what is right. As a result, individualists cannot simply appeal to the idea that there are facts that determine mastery of a language and that these facts can obtain in a lifelong solitary, for now they must contend with KW’s sceptical argument against the existence of such facts. Unfortunately, as we will observe in the next chapter, the post-KW individualists do not seem to have assimilated this lesson.

### Chapter 3 Post-KW individualists

This chapter aims to survey how several proponents of individualism have attempted to defend their thesis in the wake of KW's communitarian argument. But first, it may be helpful to first reiterate how the pre-KW individualists attempted to argue for individualism. Broadly speaking, the pre-KW individualists have relied on two related points of contention for their position, namely their intuition and the lack of plausible arguments against that intuition. Specifically, individualists have been appealing to the idea that one can imagine a lifelong solitary individual using meaningful expressions or following rules, and that communitarians have so far been unable to explain why an individual must have interacted with another in order for that individual's expressions to possess the 'seems right / is right' distinction. The appeal to intuition is nicely summed up by Ayer when he writes "it is not self-contradictory to suppose that someone, uninstructed in the use of any existing language, makes up a language for himself" (Ayer & Rhees, 1954, p. 70). And the lack of justification for communitarianism found in Baker and Hacker's criticism of Malcolm when they point out that Malcolm "must further claim [that the distinction between following a rule and thinking one is following a rule] only has application where rules are actually shared" (Baker & Hacker, 1990, p. 177).

These two points of contention are related because the second supplies justification for the first: because communitarians have no adequate explanation for why expressions or rules need to be shared in order for there to be the 'seems right / is right' distinction, the individualist can simply appeal to the idea that there is no conceptual difficulty in imagining a lifelong solitary using meaningful expressions or following rules. Consequently, a communitarian who can undermine the second point would undermine the first: if a communitarian can explain why it is necessary for a rule or expression to be shared in order for there to be a 'seems right / is right' distinction, then the individualist's simple appeal to thought experiments runs the risk of either ignoring an argument that they must respond to, or begging the question against it.

As we saw in the previous chapter, Rhees and Malcolm, who both championed the communitarian reading of Wittgenstein, were at a loss to justify the crucial premises of their arguments. These authors were unable to offer any substantive reasons for why conventional meaning and the 'seems right / is right' distinction is only available for

expressions or rules that are shared. So in the light of this, it looked like the matter was settled in favour of the individualists.

However, as we saw in the first chapter, KW has given us an argument for why a community is necessary for the ‘seems right / is right’ distinction. According to KW, the truth conditional model of meaning ascriptions is problematic and must be abandoned, and along with it its explanation of how the ‘seems right / is right’ distinction is maintained. Under the truth conditional model, there were facts about an individual that constituted what he meant by an expression, and these facts made no reference to the existence of other individuals<sup>30</sup>. Consequently, we could safely say that as long as such meaning-facts were true of an individual, then it makes no difference whether that individual had previously come into contact with others in order for him to speak a language.

But KW’s sceptical argument indicated the precariousness of the truth conditional model of meaning ascriptions, by showing that no fact could ever satisfy the conditions of being a meaning fact. In response to this, KW proposes a sceptical solution where an assertability conditional model of meaning ascriptions replaces the truth conditional one. Under the assertability conditional model, meaning and rule-following ascriptions are to be justified by reference to the conditions in which individuals would be inclined to make them. Given this, if we consider an individual in isolation, the conditions for asserting “It seems to him that this rule requires him to do such-and-such” and “This rule requires him to do such-and-such” are identical because only a single individual’s assertability conditions are being considered and his conditions for asserting either of them are identical. Consequently, the ‘seems right / is right’ distinction cannot be maintained when considering an individual in isolation, but only when we consider the individual in the context of a community whose members also possess inclinations on how to follow the rule.

So in summary, KW has rebutted the individualist’s second point of contention by giving an argument as to why a community is necessary for meaning and rule-following. Furthermore, KW’s answer to the second contention is also an answer to the first contention: by giving substantive reasons for why a single individual considered in isolation cannot be said to follow rules or use a language, it is now insufficient to simply

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<sup>30</sup> To be sure, KW’s sceptical argument is against meaning-facts in general, and so it applies to accounts that posit meaning-facts in terms of communities as well.

appeal to the idea that there is no difficulty in imagining such an individual using a language or following rules. Individualists must now go further than simply relying on intuitions about an imaginary lifelong solitary individual and respond to KW's reasons against their position.

However, recent individualists writing post-KW still rely on the two points of contention of their predecessors, despite the impact that KW should have had on the course of the debate. We will see this by examining a number of recent authors who take up the individualist view of language and/ or rules, namely Grant Gillett, John Canfield, and Jussi Haukioja. As a result, these authors do not succeed in presenting plausible cases for individualism.

### 3.1 Gillett's three thought experiments for individualism

Gillett's entry into the individualist vs. communitarian debate can be found in his paper "Humpty Dumpty and the night of the Triffids: Individualism and rule-following" (1995). Gillett sets up his opponent as KW, and he is well aware that KW's communitarian argument relies on the claim that making sense of someone's following a rule depends on the assertability conditions for saying that he does so, and "that the assertability conditions for any statement [by a speaker] recognise the fact that the speaker "ultimately ... does what he is inclined to do"", and so in the case of an individual considered in isolation, that individual's inclination "fails to capture any distinction between seems right and is right and so must leave the normative element to the community" (1995, p. 192).

However, Gillett wishes to challenge KW's communitarian argument by providing an alternative route in accounting for someone following a rule that does not merely rely on his inclinations or dispositions, and that this route can be taken by the lifelong solitary individual:

[KW's] sceptical challenge can be construed as leaving us with a problem in accounting for the distinction between *seems right* and *is right* which has relevance for an individual. I will use three related thought experiments to suggest that individuals can 'strike back' on other grounds than those given by causal dispositions. (1995, p. 192)

In what follows I shall examine Gillett's three thought experiments as well as his challenge to KW's sceptical argument. I shall argue that Gillett does not succeed in

presenting a convincing case for individualism because he either misunderstands KW's case for communitarianism—in particular KW's sceptical argument—, or he begs the question against KW.

Gillett's first thought experiment is one that attempts to show that there can be a 'seems right / is right' distinction in the case of a lifelong solitary individual. Gillett asks us to imagine such an individual called Robinson junior who uses red-dye to mark certain pots that he then uses to store dried fruit. One day Robinson junior undergoes a radical brain alteration such that he no longer sees red properly, and as a result forms the erroneous belief that he has used up all his pots of dried fruit because he sees that there are no red pots left. Gillett claims that although Robinson junior now has a new disposition to respond to his pots that contain dried fruit (i.e., the disposition to act as if he has no pots containing dried fruit left), and despite the fact that he has no one else to check with, Robinson junior can still discover that his beliefs concerning the availability of pots containing dried fruit are mistaken. Consequently, claims Gillett, there can be space for a 'seems right / is right' distinction in the case of Robinson junior. As he writes,

He may, even if he does not notice the change, 'think that he has used all his pots of dried fruit' but find that he has not. He may check up on himself by bleeding an animal and find that the relational techniques by which he copes with his domain have significantly changed. It therefore seems possible that he can unilaterally discern a difference between *seems right* and *is right*. (Gillett, 1995, p. 193)

To clarify, Gillett is proposing that in the case of Robinson junior we can make sense of a distinction between the following two statements:

- (G1) It seems to Robinson junior that he has used all his pots of dried fruit.
- (G2) Robinson junior has used all his pots of dried fruit.

The reason for this distinction is that Robinson junior can find out that he has not actually used all his pots of dried fruit, and thus realise that his belief that he had used up all his pots of dried fruit was mistaken. This possibility of realising that one's previous beliefs were mistaken indicates that there is a distinction between believing that something is the case, and it actually being the case. Thus, claims Gillett, we can safely say that there

is a 'seems right / is right' distinction in the case of Robinson junior, despite the fact that he has never encountered another individual.

However, we should wonder if Gillett's example of Robinson junior really does address what is at stake in the individualism vs. communitarian debate. The 'seems right / is right' distinction indicated by (G1) and (G2) consists in the distinction between an observational judgement and a fact, whereas the distinction that the debate is concerned with is the distinction between a judgement in what a rule or meaningful expression requires and what it actually requires. To provide an example of the type of distinction that Gillett ought to be concerned with, consider the following two statements:

(G3) It seems to Robinson junior that he should apply red-dye to jars containing dried fruit.

(G4) Robinson junior should apply red-dye to jars containing dried fruit.

In this case, we are proposing that red-dye effectively functions as a meaningful expression that signifies the presence of dried fruit. So the question is, is there any way of making sense of the distinction between something like (G3) and (G4) in the case of Robinson junior? This is a difficult question to answer on behalf of Gillett because he has not provided the tools for doing so. For even if we grant him that there is a distinction between (G1) and (G2), it is not clear how doing so can enable us to respond to KW and thus vindicate the distinction between (G3) and (G4). In other words, even if we grant that it is a fact that Robinson junior has or has not used up all his pots of dried fruit, it remains to be shown how this can help us respond to KW and show that Robinson junior should apply red-dye to jars containing dried fruit, or, to generalise, how any normative requirement is binding on Robinson junior's actions.

To see the problem, one only needs to recall KW's arguments that dispute the notion that a statement like (G4) expresses a fact. One of the main claims from KW's discussion of meaning ascriptions was that statements like (G4) can only be said to express fact if we consider it in terms of truth conditions and supply some justification for the notion that these conditions can obtain. However, KW's sceptical arguments indicated the precariousness of holding the truth conditional model for meaning ascriptions because nothing could ever satisfy those truth conditions, and so in his sceptical solution he instead advocates that they should be considered in terms of assertability conditions. Given this

new model, if we were to consider Robinson junior in isolation, then for all that Gillett has shown the assertability conditions for (G3) and (G4) would be identical and so we would be unable to draw a distinction between them, and hence also unable to draw the relevant ‘seems right / is right’ distinction that rule-following and meaning is concerned with.

We can move on to Gillett’s second thought experiment, where an entire community save for a few individuals, one of whom is named Shamir, suddenly becomes colour blind. Gillett claims that

Individuals like Shamir can go on in such practices and either put their intact abilities at the disposal of their fellows or else exploit them for their own purposes. It seems that in such a case, the individual, functionally isolated from a community with respect to the concepts under discussion, nevertheless “means such-and-such” and that it is possible that “his present application accords with what he meant in the past”. It is also clear (contra Kripke’s strong claim) that the sense in which he retains these attributes makes no essential “reference to community” and that “if one person is considered in isolation, the notion of a rule guiding the person who adopts it” *can* still have substantive content.” (Gillett, 1995, p. 195)

To summarise Gillett’s claim here, it looks like we should say that when Shamir uses colour expressions such as “red”, we should say that he means *red*, despite the fact that the rest of his community might dissent from asserting that Shamir means *red* by “red”. This is because Shamir is among the few who have not undergone the same calamity that has befallen the rest of his community. Thus, claims Gillett, meaning such-and-such by an expression does not require communal assent that one does mean such-and-such by that expression. So, contra KW, an individual’s meaning something by an expression does not require satisfying the assertability conditions of one’s fellow community members for asserting that one does mean something by that expression.

We can leave aside the worry that Shamir is not a lifelong solitary individual and therefore the example does not seem to be favourable candidate on which mount an argument against robust communitarianism. Instead, let us ask if this example can help us reject KW’s modest communitarianism; can we say that this thought experiment shows that an individual like Shamir really can mean *red* by “red” without reference to a community? Unfortunately, this thought experiment—like its predecessor—fails to take

into account KW's arguments against it, which go further than appealing to how one would intuitively respond to a thought experiment. KW readily accepts that our intuitions would support the claim that Shamir should be described as maintaining a mastery of the concept *red* in a way that does not need to appeal to his community members. But as KW would say in response, "an objection based on an intuitive feeling that no one else can affect what I mean by a given symbol ignores the sceptical argument that undermines any such naïve intuition about meaning" (1982, p. 69). Consequently, the case of Shamir begs the question against KW's sceptic who would reiterate his argument that there is no fact that corresponds to Shamir's having this mastery. In other words, Gillett needs to provide some response to KW's crucial question of 'what constitutes the fact that Shamir means *red* by "red", rather than say, *qed* (where up until a certain time something is *qed* iff its colour is red and after that time something is *qed* iff its colour is green)?

Gillett does provide what looks like a response to KW's query in this regard. In the following passage he suggests that the sceptical argument's reliance on hypotheses involving the claim that I am following a 'bent' rule (e.g., *quus* instead of *plus* or *qed* instead of *red*) is implausible given that my cognitive capacity is the product of human adaptation:

The classical sceptical problem arises because a rule-following practice has not yet been applied to the remote case (Wittgenstein – 1000+, or Kripke – 67 + 58). For Shamir, the structural entailments of his rule-following do bite beyond his past and present activity because colours and the natural constancies that make them useful to us are widely engaged in human adaptation. The remote case presents us as apt for resolution in a particular way because there are internal connexions between the whole set of operations he has carried on up to now and responses in the uncharted area of praxis. (1995, p. 197)

So according to Gillett, the sceptical argument disputes the notion that there is something an individual should do in a remote case given that he is following a certain rule; the sceptical argument claims that it is not clear if Shamir should apply "red" to a red object given that all of his past activity is compatible with the hypothesis that he instead means *qed* by "red". However, Gillett contends that organisms with our cognitive capacities would not employ a concept such as *qed* due to the way its *ad hoc* adjustment clashes with our adaptation to favour certain constancies. In other words, human adaptation has led us to favour using colour expressions in a way that is consistent with

how colours occur in nature, such that we are inclined to apply colour expressions such as “red” in a similarly consistent way. Given this, we ought to say of properly functioning individuals like Shamir that he has the concept *red* in mind when he uses “red”, instead of some deviant colour concept *qed*.

But all that this response seems to amount to is the claim that human adaptation has led us to be *disposed* to apply expressions such as “red” to red objects, and one only need recall KW’s objections to dispositionalism (section 1.5, VI) to see that this response won’t get Gillett very far on its own. To be sure, Gillett isn’t claiming that he is giving a straight solution to KW’s sceptic; he isn’t claiming that the fact that constitutes an individual’s meaning red by “red” is his being adapted in a certain way to react to red objects. But this puts him in a dilemma: either he isn’t attempting to give a dispositionalist straight solution to KW’s sceptic and so the sceptic’s problem goes unanswered, or he does intend to give such a straight solution in which case KW’s objections against dispositionalism are poised to meet him. Compounding the problem is the fact Gillett does not see himself as appealing to dispositions, as he mentioned in his earlier claim: “I will use three related thought experiments to suggest that individuals can ‘strike back’ on other grounds than those given by causal dispositions” (1995, p. 192).

We can now move on to Gillett’s third thought experiment. This thought experiment is designed to combat a potential objection by KW to his previous two thought experiments, namely that

ascriptions can be made to Shamir because of his past practice and to [Robinson junior], because we, describing his case, form a community of interpretation. In both cases, the responses would be, as it were, mapped on to a (descriptive) community norm. (1995, p. 199).

Gillett wishes to dispute the communitarian claim that legitimate ascriptions of meaning can only be made only by referencing a community. Gillett challenges this idea by introducing a thought experiment where we are to imagine “a primitive tribe is colour-blind and a colour-perceiving mutant, Theka, arises” (Gillett, 1995, p. 199). In such a scenario no one in this tribe (besides Theka) uses colour expressions, and so they do not possess assertability conditions for colour expressions. As a result, they are unable to make meaning ascriptions of Theka concerning the use of colour concepts. However, it seems intuitively plausible to say that despite this, Theka can still come to possess mastery

of colour concepts due to her colour-perceiving abilities. And so, as Gillett notes, “Theka has grasped a range of abilities each of which is constrained to meet a norm or standard which is set by things independent of any occurrent tendency to respond” (1995, p. 200). Thus, contrary to KW, meaning ascriptions involving colour concepts are applicable to Theka despite the fact that those ascriptions do not and cannot reference anyone in her community.

But once again this thought experiment begs the question against KW. Gillett has simply helped himself to the idea that Theka possesses mastery of colour expressions or concepts, and this is the very idea that is disputed by KW’s sceptical argument. If Gillett wishes to say that meaning ascriptions involving colour concepts are applicable to Theka, he needs to explain why it can be so. And recall that he cannot appeal to the idea that such meaning ascriptions could apply because we can imagine Theka participating in our community where we apply our assertability conditions to her behaviour, for this is the communitarian idea he wishes to reject. And nor can Gillett appeal to the idea that Theka has continually met with success in her use of colour expressions with the objects in her environment, for claiming that there is such a thing as successfully using an expression presupposes that her expressions are already meaningful. Thus, in the absence of providing a response to KW’s queries, it does not seem that Gillett’s third and final thought experiment helps his case for individualism.

To sum up, Gillett wishes to counter KW’s communitarianism by providing three thought experiments to persuade us that an individual can be a rule-follower without being considered with reference to a community. However, as we saw, each of the three thought experiments presuppose answers to KW’s scepticism about rules without actually providing such answers; the thought experiments presume that there are normative requirements that are binding for certain individuals, or that they possess mastery of concepts, even if such individuals are not considered with reference to a community. As a result, it appears that Gillett’s case for individualism either misunderstands his opposition’s case for communitarianism or begs the question against it, or both. Thus, it is hard to be compelled by Gillett’s argument for individualism.

### 3.2 Canfield's defence of a consistent and individualist Wittgenstein

We will now evaluate Canfield's argument for an individualist reading of Wittgenstein that he presents in his paper, "The Community View" (1996). Here Canfield sets his sights on Kripke's reading of Wittgenstein that reached a communitarian conclusion:

Kripke's interpretation [of Wittgenstein] raises this query: Is it possible for someone isolated from birth to follow a rule or use language? [...] Both the exegetical and substantive forms of that question have been discussed widely. My interest here is exegesis. The so-called "community view" reading of Wittgenstein holds that on his account of things a lifelong Crusoe could not have language or follow rules. (1996, p. 469)

To be clear, although Canfield claims that his interest in the question of solitary language is exegetical, what he means is that he wishes to restrict his inquiry to discussions concerning Wittgenstein's view rather than the views of other philosophers. As he says, "I am not concerned here with articles that attempt to decide the substantive question "Can a forever solitary person have language?" where the view of language presupposed in the inquiry is explicitly not Wittgenstein's—for example, Donald Davidson's" (1996, p. 470 n.2)<sup>31</sup>. Given this, Canfield should not be construed as merely asking "Does Wittgenstein think that solitary language is possible?" but also asking "[W]hether Wittgenstein's assumption of the possibility of a [lifelong and language-using] Crusoe is legitimate, even within the bounds of his own system of thought" (Canfield, 1996, p. 486)? The answer to the latter question has implications for the substantive debate that is of interest to us. For if one attributes, say, individualism to Wittgenstein, then answering the latter question will require providing an explanation for how Wittgenstein's philosophy is congenial to individualism, and this will in effect amount to providing philosophical reasons for individualism.

With this clarification in mind, we can introduce Canfield's two aims in his paper. The first aim is to argue that Wittgenstein affirmed without contradiction both of the following claims:

(C1) Language is essentially communal.

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<sup>31</sup> Since *our* interest in the debate is substantive, we will also be considering Davidson's views on the question of solitary language in the following chapter.

(C2) It is conceptually possible that a Crusoe isolated from birth should speak or follow rules.

Canfield's second aim is to show that Wittgenstein's affirmation of both of these claims is consistent with Wittgenstein's own system of thought. Given that the purpose of the present discussion is to investigate the substantive issue of whether it is conceptually possible for a lifelong solitary individual to follow rules, we shall be charitable to Canfield's first aim and pay more critical attention to his second aim. I shall argue that there are significant reasons for doubting that Canfield succeeds in accomplishing his second aim.

Let us begin by seeing how Canfield tries to accomplish his first aim. Canfield acknowledges that part of the challenge he faces is the fact that many previous commentators have found passages in Wittgenstein that provide support for reading Wittgenstein as affirming either (C1) or (C2) but not both. Consequently, the exegetical project of settling the issue of whether Wittgenstein was a communitarian or individualist has reached a stalemate, with each side of the debate appealing to one set of texts for their interpretation but having difficulty in dealing with the other side's set of texts.

Canfield's solution is thereby to embrace the middle position of claiming that Wittgenstein affirmed both (C1) and (C2). The key to this solution lies in what Wittgenstein meant by 'essential'. According to Canfield, Wittgenstein did not intend to mean 'necessary' by 'essential', in the sense that would read (C1) as claiming that something isn't a language if it isn't communal. *Rather, by saying that language is essentially communal, Wittgenstein is indicating that communality is simply an important and characteristic feature of language.* As support for this reading, Canfield directs us to the following passage from Wittgenstein:

To say 'This is an essential feature of street traffic' [namely that cars do not always inch backwards and forwards in random directions in some eternal gridlock] means: it is an important and characteristic feature; if this were different, then a tremendous amount would change. (Wittgenstein, 1976, p. 412)

For the purposes of the present discussion, we can be charitable to Canfield and accept that Wittgenstein did affirm both (C1) and (C2) in a non-contradictory manner in his writings. But while this might settle the exegetical issue of whether Wittgenstein regarded

himself as an individualist or communitarian, this does not by itself settle the more substantial issue of whether Wittgenstein can be said to be consistent within his own system of thought in regarding himself as an individualist. The challenge to overcome in this regard is to show how Wittgenstein's considerations on rule-following and meaning can be congenial to the possibility of a lifelong solitary individual following rules and using a language. A relevant way of meeting this challenge, for instance, would be to consider other commentators' presentations of Wittgenstein's system of thought that imply a communitarian thesis (such as KW, as Canfield himself acknowledges) and showing how they are mistaken.

However, Canfield takes a different route towards meeting this challenge. Rather than comparing his understanding of Wittgenstein's system of thought and its implications for solitary rule-following with those from other commentators, Canfield construes the issue as being soluble by appealing to examples in thought experiments and what we would say about them:

The question at issue is whether we *can* legitimately employ the terms 'rule-follower' or 'language user' in characterizing Crusoe. For Wittgenstein that question about what we can or cannot say reduces to a corresponding one about what we would say. (Canfield, 1996, p. 484)

An example-driven approach to understanding Wittgenstein allows us to reconcile our protagonists and to accept both of the seemingly contradictory blocks of text that gave rise to the community view controversy. (Canfield, 1996, p. 488)

Consequently, Canfield attempts to provide his own example of a lifelong solitary<sup>32</sup> to settle the issue of whether Wittgenstein's own philosophy is congenial to individualism. Canfield's example involves a lifelong Crusoe who behaves in way that looks very much like someone using a calendar to sow seeds:

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<sup>32</sup> Canfield actually distinguishes between two versions of lifelong solitaries, namely 'Sophisticated Crusoe' and 'Simple Crusoe', where the former has purported mastery of two-party language games and the latter only has purported mastery of one-party language games. Canfield has no qualms in granting that Sophisticated Crusoe is a genuine language-user on the basis that our intuitions compel us to describe such an individual as a language-user, and so directs his efforts towards showing how our intuitions would also describe Simple Crusoe as a language-user. For our purposes this distinction is irrelevant, as my contention against the use of intuition and thought experiments in settling the question of solitary language applies just as much to Sophisticated Crusoe as it does to Simple Crusoe.

Imagine someone who grows to maturity without contact with other humans, on some benign and bountiful island. Amazingly he recapitulates in his own development many things it took our species countless generations to learn. For example, he learns to make fire, build shelters, plough and cultivate [...] From our hidden vantage point we also see him take up the study of the sky and the seasons, and gradually evolve what looks very much like a calendar. [...] And now we observe him doing something that looks very much like setting orders for himself, by employing his calendar symbols together with what seem to be symbols for sowing a certain number of seeds from a certain field [...] In this kind of case, I suggest, [...] the person is following rules and using language. (Canfield, 1996, p.487)

We can grant Canfield that *if* Wittgenstein's philosophy was such that questions about meaning and rule-following are ultimately to be answered by appealing to our intuitions about thought experiments, then individualism is congenial to Wittgenstein's philosophy. To be sure, the antecedent of this conditional is an answer to an exegetical question, namely "What is Wittgenstein's method of answering questions about meaning and rule-following?" An attempt to answer this question is beyond the scope of our present interests<sup>33</sup>, but we can at least raise a few doubts about Canfield's answer.

To be fair to Canfield, there are numerous passages in Wittgenstein's texts where he asks his reader about whether they would be inclined to subsume a certain case under the concept of rule-following or language-use. However, it would be a caricature of Wittgenstein to take this method of questioning to be his fundamental way of deciding substantive questions of rule-following and meaning. As Kripke points out, there are multiple instances where Wittgenstein challenges his reader to come up with a fact that constitutes having grasped a particular rule, and where he disputes suggestions for such facts as being inadequate to the task. Moreover, given that Canfield himself acknowledges Kripke's exegesis of Wittgenstein as subscribing to a communitarian view, it is a wonder that Canfield neglects to discuss Kripke's interpretation of Wittgenstein. So, in other words, how can Canfield convince us of his exegesis of Wittgenstein's method as

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<sup>33</sup> For a longer discussion that disputes Canfield's reading of Wittgenstein's method of resolving philosophical questions along with reading him as an individualist, see (Verheggen, 2007). One point in particular stands out in Verheggen, where, in responding to Canfield's suggestion that we can imagine a lifelong solitary individual acquiring linguistic ability through genetic accident, she writes, "Well, perhaps we can imagine such a person, just as we can imagine miracles. But this act of imagination sheds no light whatsoever on the question of what it takes to have a language. As Wittgenstein once noted, "That one can 'imagine' something does not mean that it makes sense to say it" [(1970, § 250)]"(2007, p. 625).

consisting in appeals to thought experiments, when he does not even consider an important opposition's exegesis of Wittgenstein's method as consisting in scepticism about facts that we take for granted?

But perhaps the reason why Canfield does not provide a counter reading to Kripke is that he accepts Kripke's reading of Wittgenstein as proposing a sceptical problem about rules and meaning. If this is the case, then this gets Canfield no further, for now Canfield owes us an explanation of how Wittgenstein responds to the sceptical problem and how individualism can result from this. And recall that Canfield's appeal to how we would intuitively describe an imaginary lifelong solitary individual would now beg the question against KW: KW can grant that it *appears* that the solitary seed sower in Canfield's example is a rule-follower, but KW will remind Canfield that relying on appearances does not get to the heart of the matter because Wittgenstein also asks for the fact that constitutes an individual following a rule. Consequently, KW would pose this same question to Canfield in regards to his solitary individual—what fact constitutes Canfield's seed sower as following a rule? No answer to this crucial question is forthcoming from Canfield's discussion, and so Canfield's objection to communitarianism that simply appeals to thought experiments would be met by KW's response that "an objection based on an intuitive feeling that no one else can affect what I mean by a given symbol ignores the sceptical argument that undermines any such naïve intuition about meaning" (1982, p. 69).

We can sum up our discussion of Canfield by framing his contribution in terms of three different projects. First, in terms of answering the substantive and general question of "Can there be lifelong solitary language-users?", Canfield has said that this issue is something he does not wish to address, given that his focus is on Wittgenstein, and so it would be unfair to evaluate how well Canfield has answered this question. Second, in terms of answering the substantive question embedded within an exegetical framework of Wittgenstein's method of philosophy, namely "Can Wittgenstein's philosophy accommodate individualism?", Canfield's answer depends on how convincingly he has argued for his exegetical framework of Wittgenstein's method. According to Canfield, that framework is one according to which the method of resolving philosophical problems of meaning consists in applying our intuitions to thought experiments. However, we presented some significant problems with Canfield's attempt at doing this, namely that he neglects to consider alternative readings of Wittgenstein's method such as Kripke's that interprets Wittgenstein's method as relying on scepticism. And we also considered the

possibility that Canfield does not disagree with Kripke's reading of Wittgenstein's method, in which case there is a further problem for Canfield, namely of accounting for how he can still ascribe to Wittgenstein an individualist view. Thus, Canfield does not appear to present a compelling answer to "Can Wittgenstein's philosophy accommodate individualism?" However, there is one more project we can consider Canfield as contributing to, namely the purely exegetical question of "Was Wittgenstein an individualist?" For Canfield, answering this question involves harmonising two apparently opposing ideas accorded to Wittgenstein, namely (C1) and (C2), and as mentioned at the start, we can grant that Canfield is successful in this regard because it is not our present concern. So, to conclude, it appears that even if we are charitable to Canfield, the most we can say is that his presentation of Wittgenstein is such that Wittgenstein believes in a view that he has no obvious right to subscribe to as far as his philosophy is concerned.

### 3.3 Haukioja, bad berries, and rule-requirement errors.

Haukioja's argument for individualism can be found in his "Is solitary rule-following possible?" (2005). In this paper, his main aim is to answer the substantive (rather than exegetical in relation to Wittgenstein) question of "whether it would be possible for 'a born Crusoe', a human being isolated from birth, to engage in an activity which deserves to be called rule-following" (2005, p. 131). And, to be sure, Haukioja wishes to restrict his inquiry to the possibility of Crusoe following a rule rather than speaking a language, given that "there may well be additional considerations having to do with linguistic meaning which make speaking a language a more demanding task than rule-following in general" (2005, p. 131).

To his credit Haukioja does well in articulating the specific kind of 'seems right / is right' distinction that is at the heart of the debate, namely, that it is a distinction between thinking that a rule requires an action and the rule actually requiring that action. Haukioja believes that a sufficient condition for this distinction is the possibility of committing what he calls a rule-requirement error:

Crucially, a rule-follower has to be capable of making (and becoming aware of) a specific kind of error. She can be wrong, not just about whether a given case falls under a given rule, but about *what the requirement of the rule is*. Dorit Bar-On [(Bar-On, 1992, pp. 33–34)] makes a useful distinction between three kinds of error that may occur in using linguistic terms: *recognitional* errors—

having one's perceptual data distorted in one way or another, and using the wrong term as a consequence; *performance* errors—slips of the tongue; and *meaning* errors—thinking that a word correctly applies to certain entities, when it does not. [...] I will adopt the term *rule-requirement error* to refer to the generalisation of meaning error. If one cannot commit a rule-requirement error, this can only mean that all possible actions are equally correct—but this is to say that no standard of correctness exists, and no rule is being followed. (Haukioja, 2005, pp. 133–134)

Haukioja is thus claiming that if a person can commit a rule-requirement error, i.e., the error whereby one thinks that an action conforms to a rule when it in fact does not, then this is sufficient for claiming that there is a 'seems right / is right' distinction applicable to that person's actions. Consequently, given that the debate between individualism and communitarianism has largely been a debate about whether we can make sense of a 'seems right / is right' distinction in the case of a lifelong solitary individual, if Haukioja can succeed in showing that such an individual can commit a rule-requirement error, then Haukioja will deal a serious blow to the opponents of individualism.

Haukioja aims to show us that a lifelong solitary can commit rule-requirement errors, and his argumentative strategy for this involves examining a series of three examples that each involve a lifelong Crusoe behaving in ways that conspicuously look like rule-following, and arguing that the best explanation of such examples involves acknowledging that in each case Crusoe has made and corrected a rule-requirement error. I shall focus on the example he is most confident in—that of a lifelong Crusoe seeming to use rules to avoid eating bad berries (p.142 onwards). Haukioja sets up this example as follows. Firstly, Crusoe has the primitive<sup>34</sup> goal of avoiding eating bad berries while only eating good ones, and devises a method of achieving this goal using blue and red strings as markers—blue for edible berry bushes and red for inedible ones. Now, this Crusoe behaves in such a way that for a period of time he continuously attaches blue strings to edible berry bushes and red strings to inedible ones, and as it happens he succeeds in accomplishing his goal. However, after a while Crusoe finds that attaching red strings to

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<sup>34</sup> Haukioja defines primitive goals as goals that come naturally to a creature as a consequence of its natural inclinations, such as the avoidance of pain and avoidance of hunger, in contrast with non-primitive goals that require the creature forming a conception of how things are or should be (2005, p. 141), such as the goal of achieving a just society. Haukioja wants to avoid attributing non-primitive goals to his Crusoe because having such goals involves using concepts which in turn presupposes contentful mental states. (2005, pp. 149–150).

some bushes results in a colour combination that he finds visually hideous, so much so that he starts attaching blue strings to such bushes, regardless of the toxicity of the berries. However, this leads him to eating inedible berries, and getting sick as a result. Consequently, he reverts back to attaching red strings to inedible berries and blue strings to edible ones and once again succeeds in his goal of avoiding inedible berries. Haukioja provides the following account of this thought experiment:

At  $t_0$ , before Crusoe starts to pay too much attention to colour combinations, he is aiming to attach red strings to all and only the inedibles.... At  $t_1$ , Crusoe is aiming to attach red strings to bushes which produce inedibles and are not, in his opinion, unfavourably coloured. At  $t_2$ , Crusoe eats berries from bushes marked with blue, and gets sick. Finally, at  $t_3$ , he is again aiming to attach red strings to all and only the inedibles. As far as I can tell, the only way to make sense of this story is to say that Crusoe has committed, and corrected, a rule-requirement error. Between  $t_0$  and  $t_1$ , his understanding of which bushes are correctly marked with red has changed, and between  $t_2$  and  $t_3$  he recognises this change as an error, and corrects himself.

It is important to note that we are actually assuming Crusoe to be following two rules, which we (unlike Crusoe!) might verbally characterise roughly as follows:

(R<sub>1</sub>) bad berries are to be marked with a red string

(R<sub>2</sub>) berries marked with a red string are not to be eaten (2005, p. 144)

Haukioja believes that the best explanation for why Crusoe fails to achieve his primitive goal of avoiding eating bad berries is that Crusoe has changed his mind about the rules for using his coloured strings:

Getting sick, Crusoe fails to achieve his goal of his string-attaching activity. In our story, the root of the failure is not in a misperception of what the berries are like, or anything of the sort. Rather he fails because his different time-slices have had different understandings about the correctness conditions for applying the coloured strings. (Haukioja, 2005, p. 145)

Consequently, our best explanation of Crusoe's behaviour is that he has made and become aware of a rule-requirement error concerning his understanding of R<sub>1</sub> and subsequently corrects it.

Let us grant that the particulars of Haukioja's story of this lifelong Crusoe are plausible: that there is nothing conceptually problematic about describing—in non-intentional terms—a lifelong solitary individual behaving with blue and red strings as given in the example, and that such an individual has the primitive goal of avoiding eating bad berries. A very relevant question to ask at this juncture is how well does Haukioja deal with potential objections from communitarians who claim that none of this implies that Crusoe is a rule-follower?

To give a sketch of what a communitarian might say in response, we need only consider how KW would reply. KW would ask Haukioja for the fact that constitutes his Crusoe following any particular rule, whether it be  $R_1$  or  $R_2$ . The reader will of course recall that the attempt to answer this question is what led KW to his sceptical contention that there are no facts about an individual that constitutes his following a particular rule, and ultimately to the modest communitarian conclusion that in order to make sense of an individual following a rule, he must be considered with reference to a community. However, Haukioja does not provide an answer to KW's sceptical query, but instead replies to KW's communitarian conclusion as follows:

Kripke famously concedes that we can think of a born Crusoe as following rules, but he claims that in doing so, we are 'taking him into our community and applying our criteria for rule following to him' [(Kripke, 1982, p. 110)]. Moreover, 'the falsity of the private model need not mean that a *physically isolated* individual cannot be said to follow rules; rather than an individual, *considered in isolation* [...] cannot be said to do so' (*ibid.*). These passages have puzzled many commentators. In my opinion, the crucial point is whether or not Crusoe himself can aim at conforming to a normative standard—it makes no difference whether or not *we* would be inclined to ascribe correctness or incorrectness to his actions. (2005, p. 149)<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Haukioja's attempt at explaining what KW meant by this is also fraught with difficulty. Haukioja thinks that what KW communitarianism really excludes from rule-following is an individual's time-slice considered on its own: "perhaps Kripke's comment could be read in the following way. When we consider an individual in physical and *temporal* isolation, there is no sense in calling the agent a rule-follower. A single time-slice of an individual may have all the dispositional properties which enable the agent to engage in a corrective practice (socially or individually), but to be justified in calling that agent a rule-follower we must know whether or not she in fact *does* take part in such a practice" (2005, p. 149). However, this reading implies that KW would be alright with accepting a physically isolated individual considered across multiple-time slices as following a rule, and this is far from the truth. As we saw in section 1.6.4 where we discussed Blackburn's time-slice objection to KW, KW already pre-empts an appeal to the time-slices of an individual

However, what Haukioja does not seem to fully appreciate is that KW's communitarian conclusion flows from an attempt to answer the constitutive question of rule-following, and this question is one that Haukioja does not consider. Due to this, Haukioja's reply to KW at best neglects to address the reasoning behind his communitarian conclusion, and at worst begs the question against KW in assuming that there is a fact that constitutes Crusoe following either  $R_1$  or  $R_2$ . And so, to reiterate what has been said in response to Gillett and Canfield, KW would reply to Haukioja by again noting that "an objection based on an intuitive feeling that no one else can affect what I mean by a given symbol ignores the sceptical argument that undermines any such naïve intuition about meaning" (1982, p. 69). Thus we must conclude that Haukioja has not brought forth a compelling case for individualism, because he does not address an important potential objection to his argument.

The overall conclusion of this chapter isn't that communitarianism is true but rather that many individualist arguments post-KW have not addressed the fundamental reasons behind the communitarian arguments they seek to challenge. In the interest of resolving the debate between communitarian and individualist views of rule-following and language, individualists need to start addressing the actual arguments given by communitarians instead of relying on thought experiments. Moreover, KW is not the only author who presents us with a communitarian argument that is resistant to thought experiments. As we shall see in the next chapter, communitarian proponents have been hard at work constructing elaborate arguments for their claim that individualists cannot simply reject by appealing to intuitive responses to thought experiments<sup>36</sup>.

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as allowing us to credit that individual with rule-following, where KW argues that such an appeal will not succeed.

<sup>36</sup> It is perhaps worth reminding the reader at this point that this thesis is primarily concerned with substantive appraisal of aspects of the literature surrounding Kripke's Wittgenstein's discussion of rule-following and meaning, rather than on the exegesis and appraisal of Wittgenstein's views. There are no doubt many other interpretations of Wittgenstein that potentially bear on the debate between individualism and communitarianism—including some that focus on holistic, structuralist, and pragmatist elements of the later Wittgenstein's thought—but consideration of these is beyond the scope of the present thesis.

## Chapter 4 Post-KW communitarians

In this chapter we will focus on examining the communitarian arguments proposed by four authors, namely Davidson, Verheggen, Williams and McDowell. One of the salient features of these authors' arguments is how much they differ from those of their pre-KW predecessors. As we saw in Chapter 2, the arguments of Rhees and Malcolm faltered for want of crucial justification that only substantive theoretical considerations seem able to provide. In contrast, the arguments to be presented here are embedded within theoretical considerations of meaning and rule-following, involving e.g., how the meaning of an utterance is determined by the objects and events that the utterance is made in response to, how the concept of objectivity is acquired, how there can be a way of following a rule that does not involve interpretation, and how to make sense of rule-following without conceiving rules as sources of guidance and justification. As a result, any serious attempt to argue for individualism must contend with the theoretical arguments brought forth by such authors instead of merely appealing to thought experiments. I shall attempt to do just this and argue that all four of these communitarian arguments are ultimately unsuccessful.

### 4.1 Triangulating with Davidson

Davidson's argument for communitarianism can be found in his paper, "The Second Person" (1992). In this paper, he aims to do two things: first, to criticise KW's position, in particular its sceptical argument and communitarian conclusion, and secondly, to provide his own communitarian argument. To be sure, Davidson sees his communitarian position as incompatible with that of KW's. According to Davidson, for an individual to speak a language, that individual must have interacted with at least another individual, rather than share the same language with another—as Davidson reads KW to propose. Thus, the plausibility of Davidson's communitarian argument will depend in part on the success of his criticism of KW's communitarian position since Davidson sees it as a rival competitor. We shall begin by examining Davidson's critique of KW's sceptic.

#### 4.1.1 Davidson's critique of KW

It will be helpful to begin by clarifying how Davidson characterises the sceptical worry presented by KW's sceptic. Davidson construes the sceptical problem as one of justifying the claim that a speaker speaks a particular language, after the observation that all of his

verbal and non-verbal behaviour are compatible with the attribution of speaking any of an infinite number of different languages:

To speak a language, one must speak from time to time, and these utterances are finite in number, while the definition of a language assigns meanings to an infinite number of sentences. There will therefore be endless different languages which agree with all of a speaker's actual utterances, but differ with respect to unspoken sentences. What makes a particular speaker the speaker of one of these languages rather than of another? (1992, p. 257)

Given this characterisation of the sceptic's challenge, Davidson believes that it has a straightforward solution:

This particular difficulty, though it may have troubled Wittgenstein, and certainly troubled Kripke, seems to me to have a relatively simple answer. The longer we interpret a speaker with apparent success as speaking a particular language the greater our legitimate confidence that the speaker is speaking that language, or one much like it. Our strengthening expectations are as well founded as our evidence and induction make them. (Needless to say, we can worry about the justification of our inductive procedure, but this is not a worry specific to language.)" (Davidson, 1992, p. 258)

To illustrate Davidson's point of view, Davidson construes KW's worry as the problem of justifying that someone is speaking a particular language rather than another, e.g., that he means *addition* by his utterance of "addition" instead of *quaddition*, etc. So Davidson's response to this worry is that we can be justified in saying that he means *addition* by appealing to an inductive procedure, e.g., starting with the hypothesis that he means *addition* and having this hypothesis borne out by corroborating evidence (such as his responding to arithmetical queries with answers that are in accordance with the rule of addition), and so our justification for the claim that he means *addition* becomes stronger as more and more corroborating evidence accumulates.

But how plausible is this response to KW's sceptic? At first glance, this response does not address the actual worry behind the sceptical problem, namely the worry of whether any fact constitutes someone meaning anything in the first place. What Davidson does not seem to fully appreciate is the fact that KW uses the *quaddition* example to illustrate the worry that no fact about an individual seems to be able to determine what he means by an

expression, and that this seems to entail that meaning something by an expression is not a factual matter. As we observed in KW's rebuttal of the appeal to simplest hypothesis (section 1.5, VIII), this worry cannot be addressed by appealing to inductive procedures of interpretation because such procedures operate on the assumption that there is already a fact about what someone means by his expression, where the interpreter is simply trying to ascertain what that fact is through hypotheses and observations. Only once we have dispelled the worry that there is no fact of the matter as to what one means would it then be appropriate to leverage an inductive procedure to justify a claim of what someone means. In other words, Davidson construes KW's worry as merely the epistemological difficulty of justifying a claim that a person means one thing rather than another by an expression, whereas KW's actual worry runs deeper; being the ontological worry of whether there are any facts that constitute someone's meaning something by an expression in the first place.

However, even if Davidson misjudges KW's sceptical worry, what does he have to say on the existence of meaning-facts? Does Davidson think that there is something that determines what a speaker means by his words? It would seem that Davidson believes so. In his discussions on self-knowledge of one's meanings he writes:

[W]hat a person's words mean depends in the most basic cases on the kinds of objects and events that have caused the person to hold the words to be applicable; similarly for what the person's thoughts are about. An interpreter of another's words and thoughts must depend on scattered information, fortunate training, and imaginative surmise, in coming to understand the other. The agent herself, however, is not in a position to wonder whether she is generally using her own words to apply to the right objects and events, since whatever she regularly does apply them to gives her words the meaning they have and her thoughts the contents they have. (1987, p. 456)

Davidson thus appears to subscribe to the view that what determines the meanings of a speaker's words in the most basic cases (so presumably leaving aside for the moment abstract terms like 'addition') are the objects and events that the speaker regularly applies those words to. Let us call this 'Davidson's externalism', as Verheggen has labelled it, i.e., "the view that what determines the meanings of one's utterances is what typically causes them" (Verheggen, 1997, p. 362). So now that we have Davidson's thoughts of what meaning-facts could be, can we appropriate it to respond to KW's sceptical worry on

Davidson's behalf? The main issue with this, as one might anticipate, is how the regular application of an expression can determine the correctness conditions of an expression, given that such conditions extend indefinitely despite the totality of previous use being finite. In other words, even if we suppose that I have applied the term 'table' only to tables up until now, what makes it case that when I encounter a table in the future that my term 'table' correctly applies to it? As KW illustrates,

I think that I have learned the term 'table' in such a way that it will apply to indefinitely many future items. So I can apply a term to a new situation, say when I enter the Eiffel Tower for the first time and see a table at the base. Can I answer a sceptic who supposes that by 'table' in the past I meant *tabair*, where a 'tabair' is anything that is a table not found at the base of the Eiffel Tower, or a chair found there? (1982, p. 19)

Going any further in explaining how Davidson can respond to this worry will require understanding his argument for communitarianism, and so we must postpone it for the time being. As we will see, Davidson believes that in order for it to be the case that my term 'table' applies to some determinate object in the world—and thus have a chance at acquiring meaning—I must be observed by at least one other person.

Having criticised KW's sceptical challenge, Davidson next takes aim at KW's sceptical solution<sup>37</sup>. Recall that in KW's sceptical solution, the way in which the 'seems right / is right' distinction is drawn is through the contrast between the assertability conditions of a speaker and that of others, and this is ultimately a distinction between how a speaker is inclined to apply an expression and how others are inclined to apply that expression. Thus, according to KW, to make sense of whether an individual applies an expression correctly—and hence meaningfully—requires consideration of how others will be inclined to apply it. However, Davidson objects to this notion that the 'seems right / is right' distinction requires that applying an expression correctly depends on doing as others would be inclined to do. As Davidson argues:

If you and I were the only speakers in the world, and you spoke Sherpa while I spoke English, we could learn to understand one another, though there would be no "rules" that we jointly followed in our speech. What would matter, of

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<sup>37</sup> To be sure, Davidson simply wishes to discuss KW's solution in broad terms and not take into account its 'sceptical' aspect. As he says, "I have ignored a very important aspect of Kripke's discussion, his claim that Wittgenstein's "solution" to the problem of meaning is "skeptical" (1992, p. 266 n.7).

course, is that we should each provide the other with something intelligible as a language. [...] I know of no argument that shows that under such circumstances communication could not take place. So, while it may be true that speaking a language requires that there be an interpreter, it does not follow that more than one person must speak the same language. [...] I conclude that Kripke's criterion for speaking a language cannot be right; speaking a language cannot depend on speaking as someone else does (or as many others do). (1992, p. 261)

However, it is arguable that Davidson is not aware of the subtle aspects of KW's communitarian solution involving subjectivity. This is because, contrary to Davidson's reading, KW does not claim that speaking a language requires that there are others who also share the language. Instead, as we noted in section 1.6.2, KW claims that speaking a language requires that one is *considered* as speaking a language by another, and it is not necessary for this other person to also speak the same language<sup>38</sup>. Consequently, KW can accommodate Davidson's notion that two people who speak different languages can come to appraise each other as language-users and eventually come to understand each other. Thus, it seems that Davidson's criticism of KW's sceptical solution misses its mark out of failure to correctly apprehend it.

But let us be charitable to Davidson and construe his objection to KW's sceptical solution accordingly. So suppose that Davidson instead argued that

If you and I were the only speakers in the world, and you spoke Sherpa while I spoke English, we would still be language-users even though we never met or considered each other as language-users. What would matter, of course, is that if we met, we should be able to provide the other with something intelligible as a language. So, while it may be true that speaking a language requires that we can make ourselves intelligible to an interpreter, it does not follow that a person must be considered a language-user by another individual. I conclude that Kripke's criterion for speaking a language cannot be right; speaking a language cannot depend on being considered as a language-user by someone else.

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<sup>38</sup> To be fair, Davidson writes in an endnote that one might construe KW's sceptical solution along these lines (1992, p. 266 n.11). However, Davidson gives no objection of this reading of the sceptical solution, except to allude to Chomsky's criticism that this reading appears to destabilise KW's position as communitarian. We considered and replied to Chomsky's worry in section 1.6.2.

However, this objection overlooks KW's reasoning for his sceptical solution, namely his sceptical argument. Recall that KW argued that there are no facts that constitute someone's meaning something by an expression, and this is what motivates his claim that we can only make sense of someone speaking a language by considering his uses of expressions and applying our assertability conditions for meaning ascriptions to those uses. But given that Davidson already misunderstands the nature of KW's sceptical argument as epistemological the prospects of such a reply depend on how well we can construe Davidson's argument for meaning-facts on his behalf. In the absence of such a reply, however, it seems that all this objection has to go on is reliance on the intuitive notion that two people can speak a language despite not being considered as language-users by others, and KW would once more point out that this ignores his sceptical argument: "an objection based on an intuitive feeling that no one else can affect what I mean by a given symbol ignores the sceptical argument that undermines any such naïve intuition about meaning" (1982, p. 69).

#### 4.1.2 Davidson's argument for communitarianism

We can now move on to Davidson's argument for why interpersonal interaction is necessary for language. As we saw previously (in what we termed 'Davidson's externalism'), Davidson holds that what determines the meanings of a speaker's words in the most basic cases are the objects and events that the speaker regularly applies those words to. We also saw that this raised a worry in the vein of KW's scepticism: how does the regular application of an expression to a certain kind of object supply that expression with its meaning? However, we can leave this worry aside for the time being, for Davidson's concern is much more fundamental: what makes it the case that a particular object is being singled out by the use of an expression on a particular occasion (i.e., an expression-token) in the first place? As we shall see, Davidson thinks that in order for there to be a determinate cause or referent of an individual's expression, that individual must be observed by another individual. This notion is what underlies Davidson's case for communitarianism, for if there is no determinate cause or referent for an individual's basic expression, and the meaning of that expression is determined by the objects or events that regularly cause or elicit that expression (according to his externalism), then the expression is meaningless.

Let us take the case of settling how an individual's expression-token of 'table' refers to a determinate object in his environment. Davidson asks us to imagine a child learning to use the word 'table' by being rewarded whenever it produces the sound 'table' in the evident presence of a table. Eventually and through repetition, the child says 'table' whenever we present it with a table. Here it seems we can safely say that when the child uses 'table', it uses it to refer to a table in its immediate environment. However, Davidson raises the following worry about this seemingly safe assumption:

This seems straightforward, but as psychologists have noticed, there is a problem about the stimulus. [...] Why not say [...] about the child: that its responses are not to tables but to patterns of stimulation at its [sense receptor] surfaces, since those patterns of stimulation always produce the behaviour [of saying 'table'], while tables produce it only under favourable conditions? (1992, p. 262)

The issue before us is to identify the cause of the child's response of 'table', when a proximal cause (stimulation of sensory receptors) is just as worthy—if not more so—than a distal cause (a table) as a candidate. Davidson believes that this issue can only be resolved by having another individual observe the child's responses, who—like the child—also finds tables similar, and finds the responses of 'table' similar:

Involved in our picture there are now not two but three similarity patterns. The child finds tables similar; we find tables similar; and we find the child's responses in the presence of tables similar. *It now makes sense for us to call the responses of the child responses to tables* [emphasis added]. Given these three patterns of response we can assign a location to the stimuli that elicit the child's responses. The relevant stimuli are the objects or events we naturally find similar (tables) which are correlated with responses of the child we find similar. It is a form of triangulation: one line goes from the child in the direction of the table, one line goes from us in the direction of the table, and the third line goes from us to the child. Where the lines from child to table and us to table converge "the" stimulus is located. Given our view of child and world, we can pick out "the" cause of the child's responses. It is the common cause of our response and the child's response. (1992, p. 263)

Davidson makes two important clarifications for his condition for meaning that one's use of expressions must be observed by another who shares certain basic inclinations to

group things as similar. The first is that this condition is a necessary rather than sufficient one:

For if I am right, the kind of triangulation I have described, while not *sufficient* to establish that a creature has a concept of a particular object or kind of object, is *necessary* if there is to be any answer at all to the question of what its concepts are concepts of. If we consider a single creature by itself, its responses, no matter how complex, cannot show that it is reacting to, or thinking about, events a certain distance away rather than, say, on its skin. (1992, p. 263)

The second point of clarification is that the problem Davidson is raising for a solitary individual who has no one to observe him is a constitutive rather than epistemological problem. In other words, the “problem is not, I should stress, one of verifying what objects or events a creature is responding to; the problem is that without a second creature responding to the first, there can be no answer to the question” (1992, p. 263).

With these points in mind, Davidson thus concludes that

if someone is the speaker of a language, there must be another sentient being whose innate similarity responses are sufficiently like his own to provide an answer to the question of what the stimulus is to which the speaker is responding. (1992, p. 264)

So far we have seen that Davidson’s argument for communitarianism runs as follows: In order for an individual’s expression to be meaningful (in the most basic cases), it is necessary for there to be a determinate cause for that expression. And for there to be a determinate cause for an individual’s expression, it is necessary that there is another individual who observes the first and who also shares basic similarity responses with them. Now it should be noted that the condition of having a determinate cause for an expression is only one of the conditions Davidson thinks is necessary for that expression to be meaningful. The other condition is that the speaker should recognise the determinate cause of his expression as such, and this recognition also requires triangulation. As Davidson explains,

[If] the speaker’s responses are linguistic, they must be knowingly and intentionally responses to specific stimuli. The speaker must have the concept of the stimulus—of the bell or of tables. Since the bell or a table is identified

only by the intersection of two (or more) sets of similarity responses [...], to have the concept of a table or bell is to recognize the existence of a triangle, one apex of which is oneself, another a creature similar to oneself, and the third an object (table or bell) located in a space thus made common. (Davidson, 1992, p. 264)

In the following critique of Davidson's argument for communitarianism, we shall focus only on his first necessary condition, namely that an individual's expression is meaningful only if there is a determinate cause for that expression. This is because in the next section we will be examining Verheggen's communitarian argument that is founded upon the second condition.

We will now raise a few questions concerning Davidson's first necessary condition. Firstly, one might wonder why Davidson's own appeal to inductive procedures in his response to his construal of KW's sceptic's problem cannot be directed here in response to how we can determine what an individual's utterances of 'table' refer to. For if Davidson believes that we can use an inductive procedure to ascertain that an individual means *addition* by 'addition' rather than *quaddition*, then surely we can use a similar inductive procedure to ascertain that an individual's utterances of 'table' refer to tables rather than various surface stimulations provoked in the presence of tables?

Davidson's response will probably be that as he interpreted KW's sceptic, the problem he saw was epistemological—one of simply ascertaining that one meant *addition* rather than *quaddition*, but the problem he presents now is much deeper, where without an interpreter to interpret what a speaker is referring to "there can be no answer to the question" of what the speaker is referring to. However, it isn't clear that Davidson is entitled to claim that his challenge is more than merely epistemological, given that he sets up the challenge by asking how we can decide between two competing hypotheses, namely whether a speaker's utterances of 'table' refer to tables or to various surface stimulations of his sensory receptors. In other words, his challenge bears close resemblance to the way in which he characterised KW's sceptic's challenge, where he construed it as merely being the epistemological challenge of deciding between different competing hypotheses of what one meant. So, given the similarities, it seems that both challenges are in the same boat; either they are both constitutive or they are both epistemological. Therefore, we can frame a dilemma for Davidson: either he accepts that both KW's sceptical challenge and his are merely epistemological, and thus both have

straightforward inductive solutions, or he allows that both challenges are constitutive, in which case he must concede that his response to KW's sceptic's fails because appealing to induction does nothing against a constitutive challenge. In other words, Davidson must choose between the failure of either his communitarian argument or his response to KW's sceptical challenge.

But suppose, for the sake of argument, that Davidson chooses to accept the latter horn of the dilemma where both his and KW's sceptical challenges are construed as constitutive. And despite the irrelevance of his initial appeal to induction, Davidson nevertheless acquits himself by providing a satisfactory response to KW's sceptical challenge<sup>39</sup>. And so what we are left with is Davidson's communitarian argument relying on the idea that an individual's expression has no determinate cause unless someone else observes him. How plausible is this argument?

Let us be charitable and grant Davidson that his challenge is constitutive, that an individual's utterance is meaningful only if it has a determinate cause, and that triangulation is necessary for identifying the cause of an individual's utterance. Does it follow that a second person is necessary for meaningful utterances? It does not seem so, for Davidson needs to justify his claim that an individual cannot successfully triangulate the cause of his own utterance by himself. Let us explore this possibility by recalling what is essential for triangulating a distal cause of one's utterance. As we saw previously, such triangulation involves three patterns of similarity: a subject who finds certain stimuli similar and makes responses as a result, and an observer who shares the similarity responses of the subject, i.e., someone who—like the subject—is disposed to find the same stimuli as similar and also finds the subject's utterances in the presence of those stimuli as

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<sup>39</sup> Davidson appears to subscribe to a non-reductionist view about intentions when he defers to Wright's (1984) attempt "to defuse Kripke's view that he has extracted an essentially insoluble "sceptical paradox" from Wittgenstein's treatment of meaning" (Davidson, 1992, pp. 265–266 n.6). Holding a non-reductionist view of intentions would allow Davidson to reply to KW's sceptic by appealing to intentions to be interpreted as meaning such-and-such, where this intention does not need to be reduced to further non-intentional facts. As Davidson says elsewhere, "the intention of the speaker to be interpreted in a certain way [is what] provides the norm [for determining whether a speaker has made a linguistic error]"(1992, p. 261). However, one might wonder how Davidson can square this claim that meaning-facts are determined by intentions, with his claim in his discussions on self-knowledge, where the meaning-facts for an expression seem to be determined by the objects and events that the expression is regularly applied to: "whatever [a speaker] regularly does apply [her words] to gives her words the meaning they have and her thoughts the contents they have" (1987, p. 456). Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of the present discussion to explore this question.

similar. So now the question is, can a single individual triangulate the cause of his own utterances in a way that the cause is identified as a distal, rather than proximal cause?

Now it seems that appeals to memory will not do; a subject attempting to occupy the observer post by merely recalling the episode where he made an utterance will not get us the desired result of isolating a distal cause for his utterance, because his recollection is still an experience from a first-person perspective and so there is still no way for him to distinguish between a proximal or distal cause. What we need, it seems, is a subject who can also occupy a third-person perspective on himself and his utterances. Is such a thing possible?

To see how it might be possible, imagine that a subject makes a three-dimensional holographic and audio recording of himself applying 'table' to tables in his immediate environment. He then replays this recording, projecting an earlier version of himself onto the same environment he made the recording in. He now observes this three-dimensional copy of himself walking around the room, pointing at various tables in the environment and mouthing 'table'. Here it seems that the essentials of triangulation are satisfied: there is a subject, who—at the time of the recording—finds certain stimuli similar and makes responses as a result, and an observer who finds those stimuli as similar and who also finds the subject's utterances in the presence of those stimuli as similar. So it seems that the requisite three similarity patterns for triangulation are present in this scenario, despite the fact that there is only one sentient being involved. Thus, contra Davidson, it appears that there need not be more than one sentient being for there to be a determinate answer to the question of what the stimulus is to which he is responding.

What can Davidson say in reply to this example? Davidson might try and appeal to the idea that a 'seems right / is right' distinction is required in a case of triangulation, and this distinction cannot be maintained in a case where one is dealing with one's recording. In other words, since triangulation is a necessary condition for determining meaning, and a necessary condition for meaning is the availability of the 'seems right / is right distinction', and that this "distinction between thinking one means something and actually meaning it can be made in terms of the success of the speaker's intention to be interpreted in a certain way" (1992, p. 261), it seems that in a case of triangulation there needs to be the possibility of the observer failing to grasp the stimuli that the subject intended to respond to. This is because what is crucial for the 'seems right / is right' distinction, for

Davidson, is that we can make sense of success and failure in the speaker's intention to be interpreted in a certain way, and so we must provide an analogue of this in the case of triangulation, where there can be success and failure in the observer grasping the stimuli that the subject intended to respond to. But if success is always guaranteed, as in the case of observing one's recording, then it is hard to make sense of the success being genuine.

However, we might wonder whether it makes sense to say that in a case of triangulation there needs to be the possibility of the observer failing to grasp the stimuli that the subject intended to respond to. This is because the very purpose of triangulation in the context under discussion is to determine the stimuli that the subject is responding to in the first place. In other words, the significance of the observer for triangulation is not to provide a check against which the subject's responses can be said to be successful, but to determine whether those responses have determinate causes that are necessary for meaning to begin with. So it appears that if Davidson were to pursue this reply, he does so at the risk of misappropriating his notion of triangulation.

Nevertheless, Davidson might still find a way to insist that there needs to be the possibility of divergence in triangulation, where, e.g., the subject might point at something and say 'table' that the observer would not be inclined to say 'table' in response to, and this is not possible with one's self-recording. But isn't it possible? A subject might make a recording of himself while he is drunk. And after recovering from his inebriation, he replays the recording and finds that the individual in the recording applied 'table' mostly to objects that he—now in the role of an observer—finds agreeable, but also to the occasional object whose application he now finds disagreeable e.g., chairs. Here once again, the necessary aspects of triangulation are satisfied, and we also have the divergence in the application of 'table' that Davidson might want to insist on for a genuine case of triangulation.

So it thus seems that, as far as Davidson's first necessary condition of language is concerned—that there must be a determinate cause of one's utterances determined via triangulation—a single solitary individual can satisfy this condition. And given that Davidson's communitarian argument depends on this condition being satisfiable only when there is at least two people, it appears that Davidson's case for communitarianism is in jeopardy. Nevertheless, it must be noted we have not yet considered Davidson's second necessary condition of language, i.e., that the speaker should recognise the determinate

cause of his expression as such. And so this second condition might very well be satisfiable only by two or more people and thus provide us with stronger grounds for communitarianism. As we shall see in the next section, Verheggen attempts to argue for communitarianism on the basis of this second condition.

## 4.2 Verheggen and the concept of objectivity

Verheggen has argued for the communitarian view<sup>40</sup> in several papers (2005, 2006, 2007), but her most detailed treatment of it can be found in her “Davidson’s second person” (1997) which will be the focus of this section. As we shall see at the end of this section, her core reasons for communitarianism in her later writings remain identical to the one presented here.

To provide a brief outline at the start, Verheggen takes her communitarian view to be a development of Davidson’s, focusing on Davidson’s second necessary condition for language (instead of the first<sup>41</sup>), namely that a speaker recognises the determinate cause of his expression as such in order to count as a language speaker. And like Davidson, Verheggen’s communitarian view shuns the need for shared meanings for the possession of language. Instead, Verheggen wishes to argue that for an individual to speak a language, it is necessary that he has interacted with another individual at least once. This is because such interpersonal interaction is necessary for an individual to acquire the concept of objectivity, and the concept of objectivity is necessary for speaking a language.

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<sup>40</sup> As indicated in the introduction, Verheggen distinguishes what she calls the ‘communitarian view’ from the ‘interpersonal view’, the latter of which she subscribes to. But as I also mentioned, my characterisation of the communitarian view here is broader than that of Verheggen’s, and so it also includes her interpersonal view.

<sup>41</sup> Verheggen also has significant doubts about the prospects of building a communitarian argument on the basis of Davidson’s first condition. However, I do not think her criticisms of Davidson’s first condition are fair to Davidson. In her critique of Davidson’s first condition (Verheggen, 1997, pp. 361–364) she claims that Davidson has no reason to deny that there *can* be a determinate cause of a solitary individual’s utterance, because the individual can respond to the same object again and again across multiple time-slices of himself, analogous to how two individuals in the same setting can respond to the same object in front of them. Verheggen then argues that Davidson cannot respond by splitting hairs and claiming that the time-slices of a solitary individual are *not* responding to the same object for they are each responding to different time-slices of an object. Davidson cannot do this because then he must also carry over such hair-splitting in the social case and concede that the two individuals are not really responding to the same object but to different perspectives of an object. However, Verheggen does not seem to be aware that Davidson can reply that she has missed a crucial difference, namely that in the social case, one individual can observe the other applying an expression to an object that is present to both of them. My example of the holographic recording is intended to pre-empt this possible reply from Davidson.

The crux of Verheggen's communitarian argument lies in her claim that interpersonal interaction is necessary for an individual to acquire the concept of objectivity. I shall argue that Verheggen's communitarian argument does not succeed because it does not provide sufficient explanation for why a lifelong solitary individual could not also acquire the concept of objectivity. Moreover, I will also argue that the problem she raises for the lifelong solitary would also apply for two interacting individuals, and so if we accepted her argument that a lifelong solitary cannot possess the concept of objectivity, then neither can two interacting individuals possess that concept.

#### 4.2.1 The concept of objectivity as necessary for language

Recall that Davidson's second necessary condition for meaningful expressions is that the speaker recognises the cause of his expression as such—that he has a conception of the object that his utterance is in response to. In other words, the speaker must form a belief about what the cause of his utterance is. Verheggen believes that although “Davidson himself has very little to say about this further necessary condition” (1997, p. 364), and so has been unable to produce a convincing communitarian argument, Davidson has nevertheless “provided many of the materials out of which a successful argument could be built” (1997, p. 361). Verheggen thinks the materials for such a communitarian argument can be found by taking Davidson's remarks on the necessity of belief for language and the necessity of the concept of objective truth for belief, and streamlining it into the claim that the possession of the concept of objectivity is necessary for language:

[Davidson argues] that having a language requires having beliefs, which in turn requires having the concept of objective truth. It seems to me, however, that a simpler consideration will also make the point: possession of a language requires possession of the concept of objectivity, for the simple reason that one could not have a language unless one could distinguish between correct and incorrect applications of words. This is of course not to say that one must be able to tell whether the applications of one's words are correct or not *whenever* one uses them. Nor is it to say that one must *actively entertain* the concept of the distinction. It is simply to say that one could not have a language unless one knew, if only in an unarticulated way, that one's use of words is governed by standards, and that whether or not one's use meets those standards is an objective matter, true or false independently of one's view of the matter. (1997, p. 365)

To be clear, the concept of objectivity as defined by Verheggen is comparable to the ‘seems right / is right’ distinction applied generally—it is “the idea that there is a distinction between the way things are and the way they seem to be” (1997, p. 368). In the specific case of meaningful expressions, Verheggen is thus stating that one’s expressions could not be meaningful unless one knew that there is a distinction between it seeming to be the case that one is using an expression correctly, and his actually using that expression correctly. So let us grant that possession of the concept of objectivity is necessary for an individual to speak a language. The key move in Verheggen’s communitarian argument is what comes next, and that is to argue that interpersonal interaction is necessary for an individual to acquire the concept of objectivity<sup>42</sup>:

I wish to claim, what makes it possible for someone to have the concept of objectivity is the occurrence of certain events in his life. Now I believe that the relevant sort of event is his interacting linguistically with other people, i.e., his applying terms to events and objects around him, his applications being sometimes contradicted by his interlocutors, his consequently adjusting his applications, etc. The sort of linguistic interaction I have in mind, in short, is the sort of interaction that typically occurs when a child learns a first language. (1997, p. 366)

#### 4.2.2 Why a lifelong solitary cannot have the concept of objectivity

To begin, let us start with Verheggen’s account of how interacting individuals acquire the concept of objectivity, before comparing it with a lifelong solitary’s situation. According to Verheggen, a necessary condition for possessing the concept of objectivity is to be in a state that involves that concept, e.g., being in a dispute with another. This is because having a dispute with another involves two persons disagreeing with another on some issue, and this implies that each person is aware—at least implicitly—that what seems to be the case for the other is actually not the case, and that the subject matter of the dispute is independent of both of their views on the matter. But having such awareness of course requires that one has the concept of objectivity, as we characterised it earlier. Thus, when

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<sup>42</sup> Verheggen, in a later article, quotes Davidson as being in agreement with this: “That grasp of the concept of objectivity requires interpersonal communication is also something Davidson believed already thirty years ago, as he wrote: “the contrast between truth and error ... can emerge only in the context of interpretation, which alone forces us to the idea of an objective, public truth.” (1975, p. 170)” (Verheggen, 2006, p. 211).

two people are having a dispute this is sufficient for saying that they each possess the concept of objectivity:

Two people interacting linguistically [such as in the case of a child learning a first language] can engage in all sorts of disputes about the world they share. In particular, they may disagree about what is currently happening in their environment, and they may settle their dispute (or agree not to, as the case may be). That is to say, two people interacting linguistically may participate in the sorts of disagreements (and, for that matter, agreements) that necessarily involve having the concept of objectivity. To put the point bluntly: it is possible for them to have the concept of objectivity because there is potential work for that concept to do. (1997, p. 366)

So Verheggen is saying that in the case of a two interacting individuals, it is obvious that they can engage in any number of a variety of disputes, and so we can readily grant them possession of the concept of objectivity. For example, a child might maintain that he is right in applying the word 'table' while the teacher contests this, pointing at other tables and showing how they are similar to each other but not to the chair that the child is calling 'table'. The important feature of this is that however this dispute is settled, it is clear that because their dispute involves each party arguing whether what seems to be the case for one person really is the case, each individual thus makes use of the concept of objectivity.

Things are different, however, in the case of a lifelong solitary individual. According to Verheggen, "even if there is some sense in which a solitary person could be said to disagree with himself, it is hard to see how he could engage in a dispute of the sort suggested above" (1997, p. 366). So because it is hard to see how a dispute can occur in the case of a lifelong solitary individual, since a present self cannot interact with an earlier self while the subject matter of the dispute is taking place, it is thus difficult to grant the concept of objectivity to him on the same basis as the two interacting individuals illustrated earlier.

However, Verheggen is willing to explore other options for the solitary person to acquire the concept of objectivity, for having a dispute is not necessary for granting the possession of that concept. An obvious alternative here is that of making and realising a mistake, because believing that one has made a mistake implies that one grasps the distinction between things seeming to be the case and things actually being the case. So

Verheggen considers this option by describing a scenario involving a solitary individual who seems to have made a mistake:

Suppose, for the moment, that a solitary person could think—after all, many people are willing to attribute thoughts to languageless creatures and indeed beliefs to creatures who lack the concept of belief. Then supposedly he could think that he is doing something like walking on the path that leads to the beach of his desert island while in fact he is on the path that leads to the marsh. Suppose next that he later finds himself wallowing in the marsh. Now, the objector will ask, could events of this sort not make it possible for the solitary person to have the idea of a mistake, of a distinction between this thinking that he is doing something and his actually doing it? (Verheggen, 1997, pp. 366–367)

However, Verheggen cautions us that despite it being the case that the solitary person has made a mistake, this does not by itself imply that he *recognises* that he has made a mistake, which would be sufficient for us to credit him with the concept of objectivity:

There is no doubt that the solitary person just described has made a mistake, that is, that he was wrong in thinking that he was on his way to the beach. But there is a gap between the claim that some has *made* a mistake and the claim that he has the *concept* of a mistake, and hence the concept of things being thus and so independently of his thinking that they are thus and so. What exactly in the above scenario allows us to cross that gap? (Verheggen, 1997, p. 367)

So the pressing question now is: why does Verheggen think that a solitary person who has made a mistake cannot also form the belief that he has made a mistake? Verheggen's answer is that we can raise an issue of indeterminacy regarding what belief he has, and that any attempt at resolving this indeterminacy requires conflating the 'seems right / is right' distinction and so disregarding any notion of objectivity:

What precludes us from simply saying that the solitary person now has new first-order beliefs, in this case new beliefs about how to get to the beach, rather than a new belief about his former belief, to the effect that it was mistaken? Suppose we do describe the feeling of discrepancy he may be experiencing as his having a disagreement with his earlier self. The question then is: what is this disagreement about? Must it be about which path leads to the beach? Why, for instance, could it not be about whether the beach will stay put? Surely the

fact is that it will be about whatever he says it is about. His earlier self is after all no longer around to argue with him. But then it is tempting to say, in a Wittgensteinian vein, that whatever now seems to him to be the case is the case, and so there is no room for the concept of an objective mistake here (Verheggen, 1997, p. 367).

In other words, even if we grant that the solitary person has a feeling of discrepancy, and so it looks as though he has beliefs as to how his earlier self was mistaken, the fact that he gets to decide how that earlier self was mistaken violates there being a distinction between what seems to him to be the mistake and what actually is the mistake. And because of this violation, it makes no sense to credit the solitary person with beliefs about a mistake that would be sufficient to grant him possession of the concept of objectivity.

#### 4.2.3 The challenge of indeterminacy

To be sure, there are two steps to Verheggen's argument against the possibility of a lifelong solitary individual recognising a mistake. The first is that we can raise an issue of indeterminacy regarding what belief a lifelong solitary has. The second step is that any attempt of resolving the indeterminacy requires conflating a general 'seems right / is right' distinction that is necessary for attributing belief. What follows from this is that it makes no sense to say that the lifelong solitary has any beliefs at all, including the belief that he has made a mistake. We shall discuss the first step here in order to impose a constraint on her second step, and that constraint is that the bar she sets for the lifelong solitary that prevents him from drawing the 'seems right / is right' distinction must not be so high as to also prevent two interacting individuals from drawing the distinction.

Now it is fair enough for Verheggen to raise an issue of indeterminacy for the lifelong solitary individual. However, she must be fair in turn and accept that we can also raise an analogous issue in the case of two interacting individuals. Recall that in the previous example of the teacher interacting with a child, we considered it as obvious that there can be a dispute between the two, because we took for granted that the teacher was correcting the child's use of 'table'. In other words, we took for granted that the case was one where a child claims that he has applied the word 'table' correctly while the teacher tries to get him to see that he hasn't by pointing at other tables and arguing how they are dissimilar to the chair that the child is calling 'table', and so it seemed safe to grant them the possession of the concept of objectivity.

But suppose that we were to describe their interaction in terms that do not presuppose any features that would make it obvious that they were having a dispute about the meaning of ‘table’. In other words, let us describe their interaction in non-intentional terms, just as Verheggen described the lifelong solitary individual, where all we can take for granted is behaviour along with accompanying psychological states such as feelings of discrepancy and exasperation. Is it then really determinate that the teacher and the child are actually engaging in a dispute where one believes the other to be wrong about the correct use of ‘table’? For instance, what precludes us from saying that the child and the teacher are having a dispute about whether tables can turn into chairs, or about the optimum ratio of tables to chairs per room, or whether the wood used to build a chair should really have been used to make a table?

So given that we can raise an analogous problem of indeterminacy for two interacting individuals, we can propose the following constraint on Verheggen’s next move. Verheggen will want to argue that any attempt to solve the problem of indeterminacy in the solitary case will fail to draw the ‘seems right / is right’ distinction. But given what we have seen, she must also show why two interacting individuals can succeed where the lifelong solitary fails, and that we can solve the problem of indeterminacy in the case of the teacher and student in a way that does not conflate the ‘seems right / is right’ distinction. If this cannot be done, then we would get the paradoxical conclusion that interacting individuals are no better off than lifelong solitary individuals in their prospects for acquiring the concept of objectivity. In other words, Verheggen must show how the following worry—paraphrased from her words—does *not* apply to two interacting individuals: where the fact is that their dispute will be about whatever *they* say it is about. But then it is tempting to say, in a Wittgensteinian vein, that whatever now seems to *them* to be the case is the case, and so there is no room for the concept of an objective *dispute* here<sup>43</sup>.

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<sup>43</sup> The broad structure of this worry is that of a parity argument, where it is argued that the plight of the lifelong solitary is tied up with that of a community, such that if the lifelong solitary cannot draw the ‘seems right / is right’ distinction then neither can the community. Such arguments against various forms of communitarianism are not new. McDowell, for instance, advances one in response to Wright’s early communitarian view in (McDowell, 1984, pp. 327–328).

#### 4.2.4 Conflating the 'seems right / is right' distinction

As we have seen, Verheggen is claiming that attributing any belief state to a lifelong solitary individual that would be sufficient for granting him possession of the concept of objectivity runs into a problem of indeterminacy, and the only way of resolving such indeterminacy leads to conflating the 'seems right / is right' distinction. Verheggen elaborates on this conflation when she considers the possibility of a lifelong solitary acquiring the concept of objectivity through experiencing a discrepancy between two different perspectives on some phenomena, e.g., a stick in water simultaneously feeling straight and looking bent, and so having the belief that there can be different perspectives on something besides his own. In response to this possibility, Verheggen brings in the problem of indeterminacy once more, in this case concerning what the subject matter of the discrepancy is, and states that the resolution of this indeterminacy can depend only on the lifelong solitary, and because of this the 'seems right / is right' distinction is conflated:

Even though the solitary person may be experiencing a feeling of discrepancy, the question again is: what is this discrepancy about? Why think that it has something to do with the environment rather than with himself? Why think of it as a discrepancy between two different perspectives on the same thing? This in the end is the real problem for the solitary person: for any discrepancy that he may be aware of, it will always be entirely up to him to 'decide' what the discrepancy is. Unlike the interacting people, he cannot be in genuine disagreement (or agreement) with anyone, since how he sees and settles the dispute can depend only on himself. [...]

The argument really has the form of a *reductio*: we start by granting that the solitary person has a feeling of discrepancy; then we realize that how he thinks of the discrepancy can depend only on him; hence we conclude that it makes no sense after all to credit him with any thought about the discrepancy. (1997, pp. 367–368)

We should start by analysing Verheggen's claim that in the case of a lifelong solitary, the identity of a discrepancy depends only on him. To illustrate, let us suppose a lifelong solitary thinks there is a discrepancy between the following two statements: 'the stick looks bent' and 'the stick feels straight'. Verheggen wishes to point out that because the lifelong solitary does not have someone else to interact with linguistically, there is thus no one else to challenge or dispute his claim that there is a discrepancy between these two

statements. For instance, there isn't someone else who could argue against him that the actual discrepancy is not between these two statements but rather between 'there are two sticks in the water; one bent and one straight' and 'it looks like there is only one stick in the water'. So whatever the lifelong solitary thinks about the discrepancy goes unchallenged, and because he can never be challenged by another perspective about what he thinks the discrepancy is about, Verheggen claims that it thus makes no sense to say that he has any thought about a discrepancy in the first place.

The key claim here that we should examine is the claim that it makes no sense to say that the lifelong solitary has a thought about a discrepancy if he has never been challenged by another person on what the discrepancy might be about. Verheggen's defence of this claim lies in her appeal to the idea—as seen in her previous objection against crediting the beach-going solitary individual with thoughts about a mistake—that there is no 'seems right / is right' distinction that can be drawn here. But let us get clearer on what exactly the distinction amounts to in the present discussion. In our example, the distinction would be between:

- (i) It seems to the lifelong solitary that there is a discrepancy between a stick looking bent and feeling straight.
- (ii) There is actually a discrepancy between a stick looking bent and feeling straight.

Verheggen's claim is that because the solitary individual has no one to check or dispute with, whatever he thinks is the discrepancy *just is* the discrepancy, i.e., (ii) and (i) have identical content and so (ii) is true simply in virtue of (i) being true. And because of this, it makes no sense to credit him with (i) that would be sufficient for granting him possession of the concept of objectivity. But what is Verheggen's reason for the claim that (ii) and (i) have identical content? It isn't obvious that just because an individual thinks that something is the case and goes unchallenged on this thought, that this directly implies that it is the case—if it seems to me that  $68 + 57 = 5$  and there is no one around to challenge me on this then does that imply that I am right? A great deal of theoretical argument seems to be required for justifying the claim that (i) and (ii) have identical content and so no 'seems right / is right' distinction can be drawn here. For instance, recall that KW's argument against the availability of a 'seems right / is right' distinction for meaning ascriptions in the case of an individual considered in isolation relied on a

substantive theoretical revision of our ordinary conception of meaning ascriptions: he argued that meaning assertions ought to be justified in terms of assertability-conditions rather than truth-conditions, and so when an individual is considered in isolation the only assertability-conditions we can appeal to are his alone. So for Verheggen to argue that (i) and (ii) have identical content, it seems that she must also embark on a similar project as KW, and show us what the theoretical basis is for thinking that (i) and (ii) can have distinct content only if the individual mentioned has interacted with another person. In the absence of providing us such reasons, it is hard to see why we should accept that (i) and (ii) possess the same content.

However, a larger problem looms for Verheggen. For even if we grant her claim that (i) and (ii) possess identical content in the case of the lifelong solitary, it is hard to see why an analogous problem cannot arise in the case of two interacting individuals. Recall that in the previous section we placed a constraint on Verheggen's explanation for why the problem of indeterminacy in the lifelong solitary case is insurmountable, namely that the explanation should indicate how an analogous problem of indeterminacy in the case of two interacting individuals would be soluble.

However, it does not seem that this constraint has been met. To see why, recall that the problem we had was to determine whether two interacting individuals are actually engaging in a dispute, given that all we have to go on is their behaviour and psychological states described in non-intentional terms. But any attempt to credit them with a belief about what the dispute is about falls to an objection analogous to the one Verheggen made against the lifelong solitary, namely that because there is no one else to challenge them in their thoughts on what the dispute is about, whatever they think the dispute is about *just is* what it is about. For example, suppose that there are two individuals viewing a stick partly submerged in water. One of them thinks there is a discrepancy between 'the stick looks bent' and 'the stick feels straight', while the other claims that the discrepancy is instead between 'there are two sticks in the water; one bent and one straight' and 'it looks like there is only one stick in the water'. Here it seems we should credit both of them with the belief that there is a dispute between them on whether there is a discrepancy between 'the stick looks bent' and 'the stick feels straight', or a discrepancy between 'there are two sticks in the water; one bent and one straight' and 'it looks like there is only one stick in the water'. But, following Verheggen's track, isn't it the case that because there is no one

else to challenge them on this idea, the dispute can depend only on them? In which case we cannot draw a distinction between:

- (i\*) It seems to these two individuals that there is a dispute between them on whether there is a discrepancy between ‘the stick looks bent’ and ‘the stick feels straight’, or a discrepancy between ‘there are two sticks in the water; one bent and one straight’ and ‘it looks like there is only one stick in the water’.
- (ii\*) There is actually a dispute between them on whether there is a discrepancy between ‘the stick looks bent’ and ‘the stick feels straight’, or a discrepancy between ‘there are two sticks in the water; one bent and one straight’ and ‘it looks like there is only one stick in the water’.

Clearly, it is in Verheggen’s interest to claim that (i\*) and (ii\*) have distinct content, for if they do not then interacting individuals are no better off than lifelong solitary ones in being attributed states that require the use of the concept of objectivity. But now she owes us an explanation: what is the relevant difference between the interpersonal case and the solitary one, such that the former allows for the ‘seems right / is right’ distinction to be drawn and the latter does not? It isn’t enough to point out that this is because the interpersonal case has another person to challenge the other, for the question can be repeated here as well: why is interpersonal interaction necessary for distinguishing between (i\*) and (ii\*)? It is hardly obvious that it is, just as it was hardly obvious that we couldn’t distinguish between (i) and (ii) unless the individual mentioned there had interacted with another person.

So far we have been considering Verheggen’s claim that we cannot grant a lifelong solitary a belief that there is a discrepancy between a stick feeling straight but looking bent, because in his case there is no distinction between (i) and (ii). But suppose that Verheggen shifts her strategy and grants us that there is a distinction between (i) and (ii), and instead argues that the real problem is that a lifelong solitary can have no *conception* of this distinction. In other words, Verheggen might claim that having a conception of the distinction between (i) and (ii) is necessary for having the belief that there is a discrepancy between a stick feeling straight but looking bent, and because the lifelong solitary cannot have a conception of this distinction, he therefore cannot have the belief in question.

This line of argument appears viable, but we must ask what the reason is for denying the lifelong solitary from having a conception of the distinction between (i) and (ii). A possible reason is that the possession of this conception can only be brought about through interpersonal interaction, such as by having a dispute with another person. But now we are owed a further explanation: what is the relevant difference between the interpersonal case and the solitary one, such that only the former allows for an individual to acquire the conception of the distinction and the latter does not? Plausible explanations do not appear forthcoming: Verheggen cannot argue that it is because in the interpersonal case there can be two different perspectives on an object simultaneously, because she previously conceded that this can occur in a solitary case as well where an individual sees a stick in the water as bent while feeling it as straight. It thus appears that more work needs to be done by Verheggen if she wishes to pursue this line of argument.

To recap, Verheggen's communitarian argument can be laid out as follows:

- (V1) An individual is a language-user only if he possesses the concept of objectivity.
- (V2) An individual possesses the concept of objectivity only if there is determinacy in ascribing to him a state that involves the concept of objectivity (e.g., the state of believing that he made a mistake, or the state of believing that there is discrepancy in his perceptions, etc.).
- (V3) There is determinacy in ascribing to him such a state only if a 'seems right / is right' distinction can be drawn in relation to that state ascribed to him.
- (V4) A 'seems right / is right' distinction can be drawn in relation to a state ascribed to an individual only if he has interacted with another person linguistically.
- (V5) Therefore, an individual is a language-user only if he has interacted with another person linguistically<sup>44</sup>.

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<sup>44</sup>It might be wondered whether there is any circularity in Verheggen's argument since she seems to be claiming that an individual can speak a language only if he has the concept of objectivity, and that he can acquire the concept of objectivity only by interacting with another person linguistically. Verheggen accepts that there is a circle in attributing possession of the concept of objectivity and speaking a language: "possession of a language and possession of the concept of objectivity go hand in hand, that one cannot be in a position to have the one without having the other", and that she, on behalf of Davidson, "is not attempting to give a reductivist account of linguistic meaning" (2006, p. 211). However, this does not imply that the communitarian *argument* she gives is circular, since the conclusion is not presupposed in the premises.

However, the key point that has been the focus of our objections is (V4): the claim that the ‘seems right / is right’ distinction cannot be drawn when the individual in question has never interacted with another person. Given that the truth of this claim is far from obvious and that it is the crux of Verheggen’s communitarian argument, it is unfortunate that it is also the weakest point of the argument and that she supplies very little explanation for it. Moreover, we were also able to apply an analogue of the above argument to a case involving two individuals, and so even if the argument against solitary language goes through, it seems we must also accept that an analogous argument against communal language must also follow, and the result is that we reach the paradoxical and self-defeating claim that not even persons who interact with others can possess a language.

We can conclude by noting that Verheggen’s contention against individualism in her later work remains similar to the one discussed here. Once again the argument is that possession of the concept of objectivity is necessary for language and that a lifelong solitary individual cannot possess this concept because we are unable to draw a ‘seems right / is right’ distinction for him. The main difference between her later argument and the earlier one we have been considering is that in the earlier argument the ‘seems right / is right’ distinction concerns belief, while in the later argument it concerns successful communication. In other words, Verheggen is once more proposing a premise like (V4), where the only difference is that it now relates to the ascription of successful communication instead of a belief state:

It may be replied that a solitary person could interact with herself and thus have the concept of objectivity. But this will not do either and the reason lies in a crucial difference between interpersonal communication and the solitary person’s alleged intrapersonal communication. For interpersonal communication to succeed, there must be genuine agreement on what the causes of the interlocutors’ utterances are—this is what may provide someone with the idea of perspectives genuinely different from her own and hence with the idea of an objective contrast between right and wrong. [...] But the solitary person’s intrapersonal “communication” succeeds no matter what, that is, no matter how the solitary person draws the line between agreement and disagreement with herself, between right and wrong responses to her environment. Whatever she says goes, whatever seems right to her is right. But then there is no way she could grasp the objective contrast between right and wrong and so no way she could by herself develop a language. (2006, p. 212)

So Verheggen's idea here is that successful communication is a sufficient condition for granting possession of the concept of objectivity (analogous to how—in the argument we previously considered—believing that there is a discrepancy between a stick looking bent and feeling straight is a sufficient condition for possessing that concept). However, a necessary condition for genuinely successful communication is the possibility of error or miscommunication; such success must be a contingent matter. In the interpersonal case there seems to be such possibility, since, e.g., the causes of one interlocutor's utterances of 'table' might include chairs while the causes of the other interlocutor's utterances of 'table' do not include chairs. And so, in the interpersonal case, success in communication is contingent upon both interlocutors agreeing on the causes of their utterances.

However, Verheggen wants to say that in the intrapersonal case, success is always guaranteed and never a contingent matter. When a solitary individual purportedly communicates with himself, e.g., through hearing audio recordings he previously made to himself, whatever he *thinks* is the cause of his previous time-slice's utterances *just is* the cause of his previous time-slice's utterance. In other words, there is no distinction in content between:

- (iii) It seems to Jones<sub>t-present</sub> that the utterances of 'table' by Jones<sub>t-yesterday</sub> were caused by tables.
- (iv) It is actually the case that the utterances of 'table' by Jones<sub>t-yesterday</sub> were caused by tables.

And because (iii) and (iv) have identical content, communication between Jones<sub>t-present</sub> and Jones<sub>t-yesterday</sub> always succeeds; no misunderstanding between the two time-slices of Jones is possible.

But is it really obvious that (iii) and (iv) have identical content? Once again the same doubts can be raised here as we did regarding her claim that (i) and (ii) possess identical content. Why should we believe that simply because the solitary individual has no one to interact with, that (iii) and (iv) are identical in content? Substantial theoretical arguments must be provided in support of this claim, analogous to how KW argued for revising our truth conditional conception of meaning ascriptions and replacing it with an assertability conditional one.

Moreover, even if we grant Verheggen that (iii) and (iv) possess identical content, then we must ask whether the same problem can beset the interpersonal case. In other words, given that earlier we saw a problem of accounting for a distinction in content between (i\*) and (ii\*) by Verheggen's lights, it seems we face an analogous problem in accounting for a distinction in content between:

(iii\*) It seems to two interacting individuals that their utterances of 'table' are caused by tables.

(iv\*) The utterances of these two interacting individuals are actually caused by tables.

Thus it seems that Verheggen's later argument for communitarianism also faces the same difficulties as her earlier one, namely insufficient justification for a premise similar to (V4). The difficulties are that she does not provide a convincing explanation for why there is a conflation of the 'seems right / is right' distinction in the case of a lifelong solitary individual, and that according to her argument it seems that interacting individuals are no better off in acquiring the concept of objectivity than a lifelong solitary individual.

So to look back on the road travelled thus far, we have been considering Davidson's and Verheggen's arguments for the claim that interpersonal interaction is necessary for an individual to be a language-user. Davidson's main claim is that such interaction is required because interpersonal triangulation is necessary for an utterance to have a determinate cause and this in turn is necessary for that utterance to possess meaning. On the other hand, Verheggen's main contention is that interpersonal interaction is necessary for an individual to acquire the concept of objectivity, the possession of which is necessary for speaking a language. However, the arguments for these claims were found to be less than compelling. For even if we granted that utterances must have determinate causes in order to be meaningful, or that the possession of the concept of objectivity is necessary for language-use, these two authors did not give us convincing reasons for why it is *interpersonal* interaction that is necessary for one's utterances to have determinate causes or for one to acquire the concept of objectivity.

### 4.3 McDowell's dilemma for individualism

McDowell's communitarian argument is contained in his "Wittgenstein on following a rule" (1984), but various strands of it are found in his later writings. The argument consists of two parts: first, rejecting an assumption implicit in KW's discussion of rule-following, and second, suggesting that the only viable alternative to this assumption implies that someone can follow a rule only if he has been initiated into a communal custom. In this section, I shall grant McDowell's negative argument against KW but argue that McDowell's suggested alternative framework of rule-following does not exclude the possibility of a lifelong solitary rule-follower.

#### 4.3.1 Rejecting KW's assumption that understanding always requires interpretation

The starting point of McDowell's communitarian argument is the rejection of an assumption that he attributes to both KW and his sceptic, namely the assumption that understanding fundamentally involves interpretation:

The natural idea is that one's understanding of "plus" dictates the answer one gives. But what could constitute one's being in such a state? [...] whatever piece of mental furniture I cite, acquired by me as a result of my training in arithmetic, it is open to the sceptic to point out that my present performance keeps faith with it only on one interpretation of it, and other interpretations are possible. So it cannot constitute my understanding "plus" in such a way as to dictate the answer I give. *Such a state of understanding would require not just the original item but also my having put the right interpretation on it* [Emphasis added]. But what could constitute my having put the right interpretation on some mental item? And now the argument can evidently be repeated. (McDowell, 1984, pp. 226–227)

To say that understanding fundamentally involves interpretation in this context is analogous to saying that an expression requires interpretation to be meaningful. It is to say, for instance, that the expression 'plus' acquires its meaning by association with a further expression, such as 'applying the addition function'. Analogously in the case of understanding, the assumption McDowell is referring to implies that my understanding of 'plus' acquires content only by my associating it with a further expression.

To see how this assumption is embedded in KW's discussion, recall how KW's sceptic showed that various candidate facts failed to satisfy the extensionality condition: each of these facts (e.g., general instructions, occurrent mental states, grasp of an abstract entity, etc.) was found to be consistent with alternative interpretations of an expression, and so these facts did not determine the extension of that expression in a way that is intuitively plausible. For instance, the candidate facts we cited as the fact that Jones meant *plus* was shown to be consistent with attributing to Jones that he meant *quus* instead. Now McDowell wishes to claim that in order to reach this conclusion, KW's sceptic must assume that meaning-facts are inert in the sense of being unable to determine an extension on their own, and it is only through association with an interpretation that enables them to determine an extension. As McDowell argues, the problem with KW's sceptic is that he

presupposes that whatever is in a person's mind at any time, it needs interpretation if it is to sort items outside the mind into those that are in accord with it and those that are not. There are always other possible interpretations, and a different interpretation, imposing a different sorting, may be adopted at a different time. Considered in themselves, that is, in abstraction from any interpretations, things in the mind just "stand there". (McDowell, 1993, p. 268)

In his later writings, McDowell characterises the notion that understanding always requires interpretation as the 'master thesis' that Wittgenstein wishes to demolish in the *Investigations*:

The thrust of Wittgenstein's reflections is to cast doubt on the master thesis: the thesis that whatever a person has in her mind, it is only by virtue of being interpreted, in one of various possible ways, that it can impose a sorting of extra-mental items into those that accord with it and those that do not. (McDowell, 1993, p. 270)

According to McDowell, there are two reasons why the master thesis should be rejected. The first reason is because it is highly counterintuitive:

The master thesis implies that what a person has in mind, strictly speaking, is never, say, *that people are talking about her in the next room* but at most something that *can* be interpreted as having that content, although it need not. Once we realize that that is what the master thesis implies, it should stand revealed as quite counterintuitive, not something on which a supposed need for

constructive philosophy could be convincingly based. (McDowell, 1993, pp. 271–272)

However, to be fair, KW and his sceptic do not simply assume the master thesis without discussing alternatives. KW's sceptic has also considered responses that dispute the idea that a meaning state requires interpretation in order to determine an extension. Recall the ninth and tenth candidate responses to the sceptic involving the claim that what constitutes an individual's meaning something by an expression is the individual possessing an irreducible state that determines an extension on its own. According to the ninth candidate response, this state possessed its own unique qualia and according to the tenth candidate response this state lacks any qualia. KW's sceptic's objections to these, as one might recall, were that they faltered in satisfying the justificatory condition; these irreducible states do not seem apt to be appealed to in order to justify our use of expressions according to their meanings<sup>45</sup>.

McDowell's second reason for rejecting the master thesis is because its acceptance confronts us with a dilemma. The first horn of this dilemma is the famous paradox of *PI* §201:

This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule. The answer was: if everything can be made out to accord with the rule, then it can also be made out to conflict with it. And so there would be neither accord nor conflict here.

The reason for why acceptance of the master thesis has the paradox of §201 as one horn of a dilemma is as follows. Supposing that we accept the idea that understanding fundamentally involves assigning an interpretation to a contentless mental item in order to give it content. We now face the question of how that interpretation itself gets its content, because the interpretation itself can be considered as involving a contentless mental item that needs a further interpretation in order to acquire content, and so we are off on an infinite regress of interpretations. But more devastating than this regress is a further implication: that any action can be made to accord with one's understanding of a rule, given that one's understanding of what a rule requires is always open to further

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<sup>45</sup> To explain how McDowell addresses the justificatory condition would take us too far afield into his argument for how perceptual experience in general can justify judgement. McDowell's argument for this can be found in his (McDowell, 1996).

interpretation. Once again, this is because one's understanding can be viewed as an inert mental item that requires a further interpretation to give it content, and there are no limits to the variety of interpretations that are compatible with the mental item given its lack of content. In other words, the mental item is not able to sort interpretations that are compatible with it from those that are not because it is itself without content, and so an infinite variety of interpretations are permissible by its lights.

The second horn of the dilemma of accepting the master thesis comes from seeking to avoid the first horn of the dilemma by believing in the existence of self-interpreting interpretations—interpretations that exist and possess content on their own without any input from us. Under this picture, understanding consists in associating an expression with such a self-interpreting interpretation. The consequence of this is that it portrays one's understanding of a rule as a kind of mystical feat where one forges a link in one's mind with an ethereal non-human realm where a self-interpreting interpretation of that rule resides. McDowell thus frames the second horn of the dilemma as the embracing of a mythological picture of understanding, where understanding is construed as the grasp of patterns that exist and go on independently of anything human:

Understanding an expression, then, must be possessing an interpretation that cannot be interpreted—an interpretation that precisely bridges the gap<sup>46</sup>, exploited in the sceptical argument, between the instruction one received in learning the expression and the use one goes on to make of it. The irresistible upshot of this is that we picture following a rule as the operation of a super-rigid yet (or perhaps we should say “hence”) ethereal machine. (1984, p. 230)

A concomitant of the picture of the super-rigid machine is a picture of the patterns as sets of rails. [...] At each stage, say in the extending of a series, the rule itself determines what comes next, independently of the techniques that we learn in learning to extend it; the point of the learning is to get our practice of judging and speaking in line with the rule's impersonal dictates. (1984, p. 231)<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> The 'gap' that McDowell is referring to here is the inability of any candidate facts that were considered by KW's sceptic to determine the extension of an expression in an intuitively plausible way. It is because of this perceived gap that we might be compelled to accept the existence of self-interpreting interpretations.

<sup>47</sup> McDowell also refers to this picture of understanding as connected with 'rampant platonism', where "the rational structure within which meaning comes into view is independent of anything merely human, so that the capacity of our minds to resonate to it looks occult or magical". McDowell instead wishes to argue in support of what he calls 'naturalised platonism' which is "platonistic in that the structure of the

So McDowell's dilemma for the master thesis is that it commits us to either the paradox of §201 or a mythological picture of understanding. We will not evaluate McDowell's argument for the dilemma here, but instead grant that he has supplied sufficient grounds for rejecting the master thesis. Two questions now arise: what is the alternative model of understanding we should adopt in place of the master thesis? And how does all this relate to a communitarian view of language?

Answering the first question will help us answer the second, because the alternative model of understanding McDowell will endorse necessarily involves a community. To begin with, McDowell first canvases an alternative model of rule-following that overreacts to the need of rejecting the master thesis. This overreaction is borne out of the conviction that one must purge our conception of rule-following as fundamentally involving mentality at all. So in the attempt to move away from the master thesis, where acting on one's understanding of a rule fundamentally involves the mental act of interpretation, there is the danger of going to the other extreme in claiming that following a rule is simply behaving according to causal mechanisms set up by training. However, under this conception of rule-following, there is no room for our ordinary notion of acting on one's understanding of a rule, instruction, or sign-post, because understanding is a mental state, and mental states have been rejected as playing any fundamental roles in our account of rule-following. McDowell describes this move as follows:

When one follows an ordinary sign-post, one is not acting on an *interpretation*. That gives an overall cerebral cast to such routine behaviour. Ordinary cases of following a sign-post involve simply acting in the way that comes naturally to one in such circumstances, in consequence of some training that one underwent in one's upbringing. [...] But if we give this corrective to an over-mentalizing of the behaviour, [...] we run the risk of being taken to overbalance in the opposite direction, into under-mentalizing the behaviour—adopting a picture in which notions like that of accord cannot be in play, because the behaviour is understood as nothing but the outcome of a causal mechanism set up by the training. Such a picture might fit an acquired automatism, in which there is no question of *acting on an understanding* of the sign-post's instructions at all. (1993, p. 276)

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space of reasons has a sort of autonomy [...] But this platonism is not rampant: the structure of the space of reasons is not constituted in splendid isolation from anything merely human. The demands of reason are essentially such that a human upbringing can open a human being's eyes to them" (1996, p. 92).

So it seems that there is a choice between two unpalatable extremes, where following a rule is conceived either as fundamentally requiring interpretation, or as simply behaving according to causal mechanisms set up by training. McDowell's recommendation is that we follow Wittgenstein, who "averts this risk [...] by adding a bit of common sense, that the training is initiation into a custom" (1993, p. 276). So McDowell's suggestion is that there is a third option, namely that of conceiving rule-following as something that can only be done by someone who has been initiated into a communal custom of following rules:

What I have claimed might be put like this: Wittgenstein's point is that we have to situate our conception of meaning and understanding within a framework of communal practices. [...] it cannot be denied that the insistence on publicity in Kripke's reading corresponds broadly with a Wittgensteinian thought. But it makes a difference how we conceive the requirement of publicity to emerge.

In my reading, it emerges as a condition for the intelligibility of rejecting a premise—the assimilation of understanding to interpretation—that would present us with an intolerable dilemma. (McDowell, 1984, p. 243)

#### 4.3.2 McDowell's communitarian argument

So having come this far, we are now in a position to appreciate the broad structure of McDowell's communitarian argument:

- (M1) Acceptance of the master thesis implies facing the following dilemma: accepting the paradox of *PI* §201, or accepting the mythological picture of understanding as grasp of super-rigid patterns.
- (M2) There are two alternatives to the master thesis: the notion that following a rule is nothing more than behaving according to causal mechanisms set up by training, or the notion that following a rule involves acting on one's understanding of a rule where this does not involve acting on an interpretation.
- (M3) We can make sense of the notion that following a rule involves acting on one's understanding of a rule where this does not involve acting on an interpretation only if the rule-follower in question has been initiated into a communal custom of following rules.

- (M4) Therefore, on pain of accepting the master thesis or the notion that following a rule is nothing more than behaving according to causal mechanisms set up by training, we must accept that making sense of someone following a rule requires that he has been initiated into a communal custom of following rules.

Now suppose we do reject the master thesis as McDowell recommends, and also wish to reject the idea that following a rule is nothing more than behaving according to causal mechanisms set up by training. At this point, McDowell claims that we must accept that rule-following can only be made sense of in the context of a communal custom of following rules. However, we can ask for why this is so—what is the reason for characterising (M3) such that it is only *communal* custom and not also *solitary* custom that allows us to make sense of acting on one's understanding of a rule without interpretation? McDowell has two replies to this. The first is that thinking that a solitary practice can do the trick implies being committed to the master thesis:

It may be tempting to locate a weakness, in the argument I attribute to Wittgenstein, in the claim that we can steer between Scylla [the notion that understanding fundamentally involves interpretation] and Charybdis [the idea that going by a rule is simply a causal mechanism] only by appealing to the practice of a community. If it is the notion of a practice that does the work, can we not form a conception of the practice of an individual that would do the trick? But if one is tempted by this thought, one must search one's conscience to be sure that what one has in mind is not really, after all, the picture of a private interpretation; in which case one is not, after all, steering between Scylla and Charybdis, but resigning oneself to Scylla, leaving oneself fully vulnerable to the line of argument that I have just sketched. (1984, p. 246)

However, this reply does not seem satisfactory, because McDowell does not explain how it is that thinking that a solitary practice could do the trick commits one to the master thesis. McDowell needs to explain what the relevant difference is between a communal practice and a solitary one, such that the former is somehow conducive to making sense of acting on one's understanding of a rule and the latter falls back onto the master thesis. In the absence of such an explanation, merely asking his objector to “search one's conscience” is inadequate.

McDowell's second reply is to propose a necessary condition for meaning: an individual can mean something or follow a rule only if he can have knowledge of another's meaning without interpretation:

If Wittgenstein's position is the one I have described in this section, it is precisely the notion of *communal* practice that is needed, and not some notion that could equally be applied outside the context of a community. The essential point is the way in which one person can know another's meaning without interpretation. Contrary to Wright's reading, it is only because we *can* have what Wright calls "a reflective knowledge of features of *others'* understanding of a particular expression" that meaning is possible at all. (1984, p. 254)

There is a potential ambiguity here in construing McDowell's proposed necessary condition for meaning. The first way of construing it is that someone can mean something only if he *can* know another's meaning without interpretation. The second way of construing it is that someone can mean something only if he *has* known another's meaning without interpretation. The difference between the two is that the first relates to an individual having the potential to know another's meaning even if he has never actually done so, while the second requires that the individual has already known another person's meaning.

Now the first construal does not seem at odds with the individualist view of language that McDowell takes himself to be opposing. Given that McDowell wants to argue for the necessity of being initiated into a communal custom for being a rule-follower or language-user, if McDowell's necessary condition for meaning is construed in the first way then it would be a condition that can be met by a lifelong solitary individual. This is because the individual in question would only need to have the potential to know another's meaning without interpretation, and this potential ability does not—as far as McDowell's has told us—require interaction with another person. In other words, if we construe McDowell's necessary condition in this way, then he needs to explain what is wrong in thinking that a lifelong solitary can have the potential to understand another person's meaning should they come into contact, such as by learning what their different expressions mean and so communicate with each other. What matters for the individualist view of language is that an individual can be a speaker before he has contact with another person, and the requirement that he must have the potential to understand and be understood by another

should he come into contact with them does not threaten this idea—or at least McDowell has not given us a reason to doubt it<sup>48</sup>.

On the other hand the second construal does seem at odds with the individualist view of language—if an individual can mean something only after he has understood another's meaning then this would help vindicate the communitarian view of language, for an individual would need to have interacted with another in order to have understood another's meaning. However, McDowell neglects to explain his reasons for accepting this construal of his necessary condition. Why is it a necessary condition for an individual meaning something that he must have known the meaning of *another* person's expressions without interpretation? This is an explanation that McDowell needs to supply, because *prima facie* it seems that a lifelong solitary individual can have knowledge of the meanings of *his own* expressions without interpretation, e.g. a lifelong Crusoe keeps a diary of his experiences on an island, and occasionally he reads his diary entries to himself. In other words, McDowell must supply us reasons for framing his necessary condition in terms that only allow knowledge of another's meaning rather than self-knowledge of one's meaning. So it thus seems that either of the two construals of McDowell's necessary condition is unfavourable for him: the first is compatible with the individualist position he wishes to oppose while the second requires reasons he does not provide.

A lifeline for McDowell might be found in his writings on the epistemology of understanding. So far McDowell has claimed that in order to speak a language, one must—at the very least—have the ability to know an expression's meaning without interpretation. But one way of characterising such ability is to say that it is the ability to *perceive* meaning in utterances. So if McDowell can show us that such perceptual ability can only be acquired through interacting with others then he will have provided the reasons we have been asking for.

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<sup>48</sup> Some commentators might claim that the bar should be set higher for individualists. For instance, Canfield (who is an individualist) believes in order to falsify the communitarian view (1996, p. 483), an individualist must argue for the possibility of what he calls 'Simple Crusoe', who "is a forever solitaire who has a mastery only of one-person language-games". In contrast, the type of Crusoe we have described here in response to McDowell is what Canfield calls 'Sophisticated Crusoe', who is a lifelong solitary that "only engages in one-person language-games [...] but in addition he has a (presumably innate) mastery of certain related two-party language-games" (1996, p. 480). However, this is an odd demand given that most—if not all—robust communitarians would consider the possibility of Sophisticated Crusoe as antithetical to their case. Moreover, Canfield has supplied no reason for this demand other than his exegetical conviction that Wittgenstein accepted the possibility of Simple Crusoe.

Now McDowell believes—quite sensibly—that the ability to perceive meaning in utterances comes with the acquisition of one’s first language. In the following passage, McDowell describes the way in which an individual’s perceptual capacities changes as he learns a first language, and he alludes that this process involves other people:

The natural metaphor for the learning of a first language is “Light dawns”. For light to dawn is for one’s dealings with language to cease to be blind responses to stimuli: one comes to hear utterances as expressive of thoughts, and to make one’s own utterances as expressive of thoughts. This seems indistinguishable from coming to have something to say, and to conceive others as having something to say [...] [W]orking one’s way into language—or better, being cajoled into it—is, simultaneously, working one’s way into a conception of the world, including a conception of oneself as a person among others. (1981, p. 333)

Here McDowell is indicating that learning a language involves being able to hear meanings in other people’s utterances and to express one’s thoughts to others. Now we can grant McDowell that this is what typically happens when one learns a language; we can allow that it is an empirical fact that language acquisition occurs in communal settings where a learner comes to understand and communicate his thoughts to others as part of his training. However, McDowell’s communitarian argument has aspirations that reach beyond empirical facts—he wishes to claim that it is conceptually impossible for an individual to acquire the ability to perceive meaning in utterances without having interacted with another individual. But unfortunately, nothing in this passage helps him in this regard; McDowell offers us no explanation for why the light of language cannot dawn on a lifelong solitary individual so that he can perceive meanings in his own former utterances.

To conclude, the problem with McDowell’s communitarian argument is that—like the pre-KW ones before it such as Malcolm’s and Ayer’s—it fails to give reasons for its key premise, that in this case is (M3). In other words, such arguments state a premise that gives a necessary condition for meaning or rule-following, but their authors are unable to give sufficient explanation for why that condition can only be met by a community rather than a lifelong solitary individual.

## 4.4 Williams and bedrock rule-following

Williams' argument for communitarianism can be found in her "Blind obedience: rules, community and the individual" (1991). She takes the framework of her argument to be faithful to Wittgenstein's, and it can be broadly characterised in terms of two steps: First, presenting and arguing against what she calls the 'Classical View' of rule-following, and second, suggesting that the only viable alternative to the 'Classical View' is one where the objectivity of rule-following can be accounted for only if we presuppose a communal practice. In this section I shall argue that there are many ambiguities in her argument for why the alternative to the 'Classical View' requires that rule-following practices are communal. But even after clarifying these ambiguities, I shall point out that Williams does not succeed in establishing the necessity of a communal practice for rule-following.

### 4.4.1 The Classical View of rule-following

To help illustrate what she takes to be the 'Classical View' of rule-following, Williams first identifies two dimensions of rule-governed practices in order to show how the Classical View seeks to account for them:

There are two dimensions to rule-governed practices and actions: the *practical, or psychological, dimension*, the way in which the behavior or judgment of the individual is in fact guided or determined; and the *justificatory, or epistemic, dimension*, the way in which the action or judgment is assessed for correctness. (1991, p. 93)

So to explain the practical dimension of rule-governed practices is to tell a story of how a rule-follower's actions are guided by a rule, and to explain the justificatory dimension is to give an account of how a rule-follower's action can be assessed as being in accord or discord with the rule. To illustrate, a truth conditional account of rule-following might explain these two dimensions as follows: there is a mental state that constitutes someone's understanding the rule of '+2', and it is this state that indicates to him how he should apply the rule (practical dimension), and also sets a standard according to which his actions can be assessed as being in accord or discord with the rule (justificatory dimension). It is worth keeping in mind that these two dimensions do not necessarily apply throughout all rule-governed practices. For as we shall see later, Williams will argue that Wittgenstein's own picture of meaning and rule-following (a communitarian one, to be

sure) will require the practical and justificatory dimensions to be relinquished at a certain point in our conception of rule-governed practices in a way that still preserves the objectivity of rules.

Nevertheless, Williams thinks that any account of rule-following ought to show how the practical and justificatory dimensions are connected when they are present, because “unless there is a convergence of our justification and our guide to action, we are left with an unsettling gulf between why we ought to act as we do and why in fact we do so act” (1991, p. 94). That these two dimensions need to be connected seems intuitively correct, for if the two dimensions were unrelated then we would have the problem of trying to account for one without recourse to the other. In other words, how can we explain why I am guided by the rule of *addition* to write ‘125’ in response to ‘ $68 + 57 = ?$ ’, without appealing to the idea that there are correct and incorrect responses I could make in relation to conforming to the rule of addition? And conversely, how can we explain why there are correct and incorrect actions in the above circumstance without implying that there is something in the rule of addition that guides a competent user of the rule of *addition* to write ‘125’?

Now what Williams calls the ‘Classical View’ of rule-following claims that some feature of a rule plays the fundamental role in both dimensions: “a rule serves both as a guide to the individual in determining what he does or says, and as a basis for justifying or assessing what he does or says.” According to the Classical View, a rule possesses “epistemic primacy” when it comes to “assessing correctness or appropriateness”, and it sets “a standard of correctness that is independent of the applications” (1991, p. 94). In other words, the Classical View offers a practice-transcendent account of how rules guide and justify actions, where the source of a rule’s guidance and justification is located in some aspect of the rule as something that possesses “content that is independent of our engagements in our practices” (1991, p. 105).

Given all this, what Williams takes as the target of Wittgenstein’s negative considerations on rule-following and meaning is a picture of rule-following that is a refinement of the Classical View. According to Williams, this picture that Wittgenstein attacks has three components:

That [something] (1) can come before the mind and be grasped “in a flash”, in other words, something isolable, but which (2) can serve as a guide for certain

future actions, and also (3) can set a standard for the correctness of those actions. (1991, p. 95)

We can see that (2) and (3) correspond with the practical and justificatory dimension of rule-governed practices distinguished earlier. Given this, we can see that this picture of rule-following is a refinement of the Classical View in that it claims that something isolable, i.e., something that can come to mind and be grasped in a flash and “isolable from any context and history of use” (1991, p. 96), can account for both the practical and justificatory dimensions of rule-governed and linguistic practices. Furthermore, this ‘isolability’ connects with the Classical View’s insistence that what guides and justifies according to a rule is something that is practice-transcendent, because what serves as the guide and standard of correctness for that rule is something that is isolable from any context and history of use. In contrast, Williams will argue that non-isolable processes such as community agreement over time and forming a second nature through acculturation are what we should base our conception of rule-following on.

With this picture of rule-following and meaning in sight, Williams moves on to sketch how Wittgenstein deploys two arguments to oppose it, namely what she calls the Regress Argument (henceforth, ‘RA’), and the Paradox of Interpretation (henceforth, ‘PoI’), each attacking a specific aspect of the picture:

To develop Wittgenstein’s attack on this picture of meaning, I am going to separate two arguments that are often treated as the same. The first is a variant of the Infinite Regress Argument and the second is the Paradox of Interpretation so emphasized by Kripke. The Regress Argument shows that nothing could meet (1) and yet perform the task set out in (2). And the Paradox shows that nothing meeting (1) could fulfil the role set out in (3). The Regress, I shall argue, shows that in the end meaning must be something other than an act of interpretation or that which requires interpretation. The Paradox builds on this to establish a more radical conclusion, namely, that the very distinction between correct and incorrect collapses from within the Classical View: We have no standard for correctness at all. (1991, pp. 95–96)

#### 4.4.2 Williams' distinction between the Regress Argument and the Paradox of Interpretation

According to Williams, what drives RA is the assumption at the heart of the picture of meaning and rule-following just sketched, namely the assumption that what guides and justifies our use of rules and expressions is an isolable entity. The problem with this assumption comes from the observation that “any picture, chart, schema (i.e., any *isolable* representational object) is susceptible to more than one interpretation, to more than one use” (1991, p. 95). Thus, in order for an isolable entity to serve as a guide for future actions, it is not enough that it come before one's mind, for it must be accompanied by an interpretation. The obvious problem with this is that that interpretation can also be conceived as an isolable entity in itself, and so it can only guide by being accompanied by a further interpretation. And so it seems we have an infinite regress of interpretations on our hands:

The regress is generated, not by the multiplicity of interpretations per se, but by the assumption that that which guides is something that can come before the mind, isolable from any context and history of use. In other words, if our picture of being guided by a rule requires interpretation because the rule as something that can come before the mind and be grasped in a flash—an isolable entity—is subject to multiple interpretations, then *for the same reason* our interpretation requires interpretation, and so on. (1991, p. 96)

In relation to the problem of interpretation, Williams gives Wittgenstein's example that if an isolable entity such as a picture of a cube is considered as the meaning of the expression “cube”, then “cube” would have to be applied differently depending on the method of projection applied to that picture. Thus, she asks, “What assumptions enable us to take a projection of “cube” that picks out triangles as a *rival* to the usual projection that picks out cubes?” (1991, p. 95).

Given these claims and examples, we can extrapolate that Williams' characterisation of RA runs as follows, with an example taken from Kripke (Kripke, 1982, p. 16). Any isolable entity that is proposed as that which guides or justifies one's action when following a rule can be interpreted in different ways, in the sense that different methods of projections can be applied to it, or that the entity relies on further stipulated instructions on how one should follow it. And if it is proposed that a particular interpretation is to be preferred by appealing to a further interpretation, then the question of how that

interpretation ought to be interpreted can be raised and thus we are off on a regress. This predicament can be illustrated with the example of asking what isolable entity guides or justifies our use of '+', noting that we could interpret '+' as being guided and justified according to the *plus* function, in which case we ought to answer '125' to '68+57=?', or we could interpret '+' as being guided and justified according to the *quus* function in which case we ought to answer '5'. Someone might reply to this problem by saying that what makes it the case that '+' is guided and justified according to the *plus* function is the fact that when he encounters '+', the following stipulation comes to his mind in a flash: 'By '+' I mean the function such that, in considering ' $x + y = ?$ ', we should count the number  $x$ , and then count the number  $y$ , and then count the total of  $x$  and  $y$  put together'. This stipulation, he might say, is the isolable entity that comes to mind that determines that it is the *plus* function that guides and justifies his actions when he uses '+'. But of course the question of interpretation can re-emerge, for 'count' is an expression just as '+' was, and so we can ask what makes it the case that his use of 'count' is to be guided and justified according to the concept of *counting*, rather than some other deviant concept like *qounting* that is compatible with *quus*. So now it seems our subject would have to appeal to a further isolable entity, where the problem of interpretation can simply rear its head once more.

It is important to note that Williams' sees RA as applying to expressions (including expressions for rules), rather than actions. For as our example shows, the problem of interpretation plagues our attempts to say how we should interpret the expression '+'. Also, in the example she alluded to, the problem was one of determining the correct method of projection for a picture of a cube that determines the meaning of the expression 'cube'. The general problem of RA is that we have no way of singling out a particular method of projection or particular interpretation of an isolable entity that is supposed to determine what we mean by an expression or what rule we are following, and every attempt to do so goes via appealing to another isolable entity that is itself vulnerable to the same sceptical consideration.

In contrast, Williams' characterisation of the Paradox of Interpretation (PoI) sees it as applying not to expressions, but to the actions performed in accordance with those expressions. What's more, Williams thinks that RA and PoI are independent of each other, in the sense that even if we have a solution to RA, PoI can still take hold:

The Paradox of Interpretation differs from the Regress in that it does not focus on the interpretation [of a rule], but on the action itself and the fact that it can be multiply interpreted. It is important to see that the interpretations themselves could be transparent (and so would not generate a regress) and yet the action could be made out to accord or conflict with the given interpretation. For example, any finite numerical sequence can be made out to conform to more than one mathematical formula. (1991, pp. 122–123)

So according to Williams, “the Paradox of Interpretation builds on the Regress Argument but shows something distinct and more radical” (1991, p. 96). Even if we have an adequate response to RA by finding an interpretation or method of projection that is immune to further interpretations (In Williams’ terminology this is to have a ‘transparent’ rule), PoI can still take hold, for any action can be made out to accord or conflict with that interpretation. As she writes,

It is not just that we cannot see what makes one interpretation preferable to another (the point of the Regress Argument), but that we cannot make sense of the very distinction between correct and incorrect action, even if the rule in the subject’s mind were transparent, i.e., were self-interpreting. Even a transparent rule carries no constraint on *what* action is performed, as any action can be characterized to accord with that rule or not. (1991, p. 97)<sup>49</sup>

However, a short discussion on the viability of this distinction here is in order. It seems hard to grasp how PoI can still take hold despite having solved RA; it is hard to see how, as she says, a transparent rule carries no constraint on what action is performed. Recall in our illustration of RA that the problem was of determining whether our use of ‘+’ is guided and justified according to the *plus* function rather than the *quus* function, and we stipulated that the *plus* function requires us to answer ‘125’ to ‘68 + 57 = ?’ whereas the *quus* function required us to answer ‘5’. And moreover, recall that in Williams’ given example, she granted that a method of projection of a picture of a cube could pick out either triangles or cubes if the picture was construed as the meaning of ‘cube’; she has

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<sup>49</sup> It may be of some interest to compare Williams with McDowell on the problem of self-interpreting rules. Williams seems to think that the problem of believing in self-interpreting rules is that it leads to a further problem, namely that it is susceptible to PoI. However, recall that McDowell (section 4.3.1) would view the suggestion of self-interpreting rules as problematic on its own, because it subscribes to the mythological picture of understanding, where understanding a rule is conceived of as grasp of super-rigid (in the sense of being judgment and practice independent) patterns. To be sure, I am not claiming that the problems McDowell and Williams raise for self-interpreting rules are incompatible, but merely distinct.

granted that methods of projection can determine the application of an expression and the problem raised was simply how to determine which method of projection applies. So suppose that we have solved the problem of interpretation in the case of '+' and so have entitled ourselves to the claim that it is the *plus* function that guides and justifies our use of '+'; we now have a transparent interpretation of '+', namely, the *plus* function, and this is transparent in the sense that we can see what the rule requires of us to do, i.e., it clearly requires us to answer '125' to '68 + 57 = ?'. Analogously, if we have solved the problem of determining which method of projection applies to our picture of a cube that we claim constitutes the meaning of 'cube', then we have *ipso facto* also solved the problem of whether or not we should use 'cube' in application to cubes or triangles. So in other words, solving RA by finding a transparent interpretation of an expression or rule entitles us to say that the expression or rule places a constraint on our actions that attempt to apply it.

So given that a transparent interpretation of an expression or rule does seem to place constraints on what actions are in accord or discord with it, it is hard to see how there can be a distinct and further problem raised by PoI even if RA is solved. To be sure, Williams thinks otherwise. As the example she supplied above indicates, any finite numerical sequence can be made out to conform to more than one mathematical formula, and this leads to the claim of PoI that any action can be made out to accord or conflict with a rule. However, what she fails to note is that the claim of PoI is generated by the observation that any finite numerical sequence can be made out to conform to more than one mathematical formula *only if* it is still a matter of contention what mathematical formula we should interpret the rule as supplying. In other words, if we haven't settled what mathematical formula we should interpret the instruction 'continue the series by adding 2' as supplying, then we must grant that writing '1008' after '996, 998, 1000 ...' might very well be in accord with the instruction. But once we have settled on one interpretation, i.e., solved RA by finding a transparent interpretation, then it will also be settled whether a given action accords or conflicts with the instruction. This is because transparent interpretations of rules, as mentioned above, do place constraints on our actions in our attempts to apply the rule.

Now it might be replied on Williams' behalf that there is the independence she claims between RA and PoI, by appealing to a distinction that Wright (1989a) has made between two distinct but related problems raised by KW and Wittgenstein. The idea here is that

Wright has noted two problems on rule-following that are independent from each other, and so Williams might be able to model RA and PoI after Wright's problems and so gain independence for hers. The first problem is the one Wright sees as being raised by KW's sceptic, namely the problem of 'What facts constitute an individual following a particular rule?'<sup>50</sup> The second problem is one that Wright identifies Wittgenstein as raising in his rule-following considerations, namely the problem of 'How is it possible to know what the rule which I grasp requires of me here?' Wright claims that the first problem—KW's sceptic's problem—relies on an unsupported reductionism, according to which "states having content are somehow to be constituted out of materials whose description, at the point where they are introduced into the debate with the Sceptic, does not presuppose their contentfulness" (1989a, p. 292). And so KW's sceptic's problem is relatively easily dealt with by arguing for the rejection of this assumption, and so entitling ourselves to cite as the fact that constitutes our following the rule of, say, *addition*, the very fact itself that one is following the rule of *addition*.

However, Wright points out that KW's sceptic's problem is independent of Wittgenstein's problem, for even if we have rejected KW's sceptic's assumption and so have at our disposal a solution to KW's sceptic's problem, Wittgenstein's problem remains unsolved. Wittgenstein's problem, according to Wright, is to answer "how is it possible to be effortlessly, non-inferentially, and generally reliably authoritative about psychological states which have no distinctive occurrent phenomenology and which have to answer, after the fashion of dispositions, to what one says and does in situations so far unconsidered?" (1989a, p. 294). In other words, even if we have a solution to the problem of identifying the facts that constitute an individual following a particular rule, and so are able—in principle—to determine what rule he is in fact following, we still have a problem of how to reconcile the first-person epistemology of intentional states with their disposition-like theoreticity<sup>51</sup>.

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<sup>50</sup> Wright's actual phrasing of the problem is 'How is it possible to know which rule I (used to) follow?' However, he is aware that this problem is not epistemological, since it involves an "idealized subject who [...] knows all there is to know about his or her former mental life and behaviour" (1989a, p. 290), and so the problem really is a constitutive one where "Kripke's Sceptic directs his Paradox at the very existence of rules and rule-following" (1989a, p. 303).

<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, it seems that the epistemological question places a constraint on the constitutive question of what facts determine the rule one is supposedly following. This is because, given that we seem to be able to know what rule we are following without inference, the fact that constitutes our following a particular rule must be able to be known non-inferentially as well.

So given that Wright's two problems are independent of each other, can Williams map RA and PoI onto them and thus claim that they are also independent? Unfortunately, this does not look like a viable option for Williams. This is because Wright's second problem remains live even after we have settled the issue of determining what actions would be in accord with a rule that an individual is purported to be following, but the same cannot be said for Williams' PoI. In other words, even if we grant that there is determinacy in what actions are in accord with a rule and that a rule-follower has accepted this rule, we still have the problem of explaining how that rule-follower can know what rule he has accepted, given that this knowledge is constitutively dependent on actions he has yet to perform. But granting the same to Williams' PoI is to effectively grant a solution to it, given that the main thrust of PoI is that there is indeterminacy in what actions are in accord with a rule.

#### 4.4.3 Williams' distinction between the necessity and normativity of rules:

Nevertheless, we can press on and consider Williams' communitarian argument. So far we have considered Williams' characterisation of Wittgenstein's attack on the picture of meaning according to which an isolable entity plays two roles: it serves as a guide for future actions, and also sets the standard of correctness for these future actions. Furthermore, we have also seen how these two roles correspond to what she has labelled as the practical and justificatory dimensions of rule-governed practices, and so we can characterise the picture of meaning and rule-following as claiming that an isolable entity is what accounts for these two dimensions of our rule-governed practices. Moreover, she also distinguished two arguments in Wittgenstein's attack on this picture, where each argument corresponds to a dimension that the picture tries to account for: RA is an argument that no isolable entity can play the role of serving as a guide for future actions so that it cannot account for the practical dimension, while PoI is an argument that no isolable entity can set the standards of correctness of actions and so it cannot account for the justificatory dimension. We thus have two facets of rule-governed practices that a picture of rule-following and meaning is trying to account for, and two distinct arguments that Wittgenstein deploys that corresponds to the two facets and how the picture fails to account for either.

In addition to these divisions, Williams believes that there is a distinction between two components of the objectivity of rule-following:

By the “objectivity of rule-following,” I mean the fact that rules distinguish between correct and incorrect applications (what I shall call the “normativity of rules”) and that they impose a constraint on the behavior of the individual that is independent of his mere say-so (“the necessity of rules”). (1991, p. 93)

One reason for distinguishing between the normativity and necessity of rules (although they might not be independent in making sense of rules) is that Williams thinks that RA and PoI also attack the ability of the Classical View to account for each component:

The Regress Argument shows that the view of objectified meaning as embodied in decision, formula, or any other candidate for the role cannot account for the *necessity of rules*, for the fact that rules constrain the behavior of the agent. The Paradox shows that the view cannot account for the *normativity of rules*, for the fact that there is a substantive distinction between correct and incorrect. There is nothing in the mind of the agent or in the behavior of the agent that shows what rule he is following, so long as we think of rules as embodying objectified meaning. (1991, pp. 97–98)

A further reason, as we shall see, concerns how the epistemic and practical dimensions of rule-governed practices shift to become the normativity and necessity of rules under Wittgenstein’s alternative picture.

#### 4.4.4 Wittgenstein’s alternative communitarian picture

So we come to the question, if following a rule does not involve having an isolable entity in mind that guides one’s action and provides a standard of correctness according to which one’s attempt at following the rule is assessed, then what does it involve? What accounts for the normativity and necessity of a rule if not something that is grasped in a flash when one understands and follows a rule? Williams’ answer is as follows:

At the heart of [Wittgenstein’s] alternative, then, are the social character of meaning and the importance of the process of training. Each introduces a new approach, respectively, to what I have been calling the epistemic and practical dimensions of rule-following. Under this new approach these two dimensions change to that of the normativity and necessity of rule-following. Together they provide an account of the objectivity of rule-following. Each avoids positing an isolable state of mind or formula or interpretation as the objectified, and so constraining, meaning. Each develops a dynamic rather than static account of

rule-governed practice. This is just what would be expected in developing the idea that meaning is use. (1991, p. 104)

To reiterate, Williams thinks that under Wittgenstein's alternative to the Classical View's picture of rule-following and meaning, there is a point in our understanding of rule-governed practices where we must give up the epistemic dimension of rule following (i.e., the idea that we can justify an attempt to follow a rule by appealing to the rule), and instead settle for the normativity of rule-following (i.e., that rules still distinguish between correct and incorrect applications). And similarly there is a point where we must dismiss the practical dimension of rule-following (i.e., the idea that following a rule involves being guided by that rule), and where we must instead accept the necessity of rule following (i.e., that rules still impose a constraint on the behaviour of the individual that is independent of his mere say-so). But why and how do the two dimensions shift into the two components of the objectivity of rule-following under Wittgenstein's alternative to the Classical View's picture of meaning? The reason for the change lies in Williams' reading of Wittgenstein's response to the paradox in *PI* §201, where Wittgenstein is read as suggesting that there is a certain kind of rule-following where the epistemic and practical dimensions of rule-following no longer apply:

The way out of the difficulties raised by the Regress Argument and the Paradox of Interpretation is, according to Wittgenstein, to recognize that "... there is a way of grasping a rule which is *not an interpretation*, but which is exhibited in what we call "obeying the rule" and going against it" in actual cases" (*PI* §201). In short, there is a way of engaging in rule-following that is not *following* [in the sense of being guided by] a rule nor *justifying* by appeal to a rule nor advertent in any way to a rule conceived as having an objectified content, that is, a content that is independent of our engagements in our practices. (1991, pp. 104–105)

According to Williams' reading, there is a way of following a rule that does not involve being guided by a rule (practical dimension), and also does not involve having one's action assessed or justified as being in accordance with the rule (epistemic dimension). This way of following a rule is found when we consider the point at which our justifications for following a rule give out, when we simply act on our inclinations that have been inculcated through training:

This is the point of Wittgenstein's remarks that "... my reasons will soon give out. And then I shall act without reasons" (PI §211); and [i]f I have exhausted the justifications I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: "This is simply what I do" (PI §217). And what I do "... when I obey a rule, I do not choose. I obey the rule *blindly*" (PI §219). (1991, p. 105)

To provide an example, when asked for the justification for why I think that writing '1002' in response to '996, 998, 1000 ...' is in accord with the instruction 'continue the series by adding 2', I might attempt to explain myself to my interlocutor by saying that '1002 is the sum of 1000 and 2'. And when my interlocutor presses further by asking what is my justification for saying that '1002 is the sum of 1000 and 2', I might try to further explain myself by appealing to the notion of counting, that 'if I count up to 1000 marbles and then count 2 more then I would have 1002 marbles', and so on. Eventually, however, my interlocutor's questioning will reach a point where I am unable to give a non-circular justification for my writing '1002' and where I will simply say something like 'This is how it strikes me'. This end-point of justifications for acting according to a rule is called 'bedrock' by Williams, following Wittgenstein. At this bedrock point, I am no longer appealing to something that guides or justifies my writing '1002', and so there is no scope for the manifestation of the practical or epistemic dimensions of rule-following at this point. Furthermore, in Williams' terminology, my statement that 'This is how it strikes me' is categorised as a 'bedrock reason' that I give to my interlocutor, whose function is "*not* to justify the judgement in question but to bring the requests for justification to an end" (1991, p. 114).

But despite the fact that at bedrock there is no room for a practical or epistemic account of rule-following, Williams thinks there is nevertheless scope for the notions of normativity and necessity, i.e., there is scope for the objectivity of rule-following. As she claims, "Wittgenstein's appeal to the metaphor of blind obedience is his way of emphasizing that bedrock rule-following is normative without being justificatory and necessary (or constraining), without being independent of human practice" (1991, p. 105).

However, and very importantly, what is required for the objectivity of rule-following at bedrock level is a community:

Wittgenstein gives us a new way to think about the normativity and necessity of "rule-governed" practices. Both features involve the community. The

normativity of rules is grounded in community agreement over time; and the constraint or necessity of rules is grounded in forming a second nature, which is achieved through a process of acculturation. [...]The very logic of actions, of obeying a rule, presupposes a context of structure, and that is provided by the actual harmonious interactions of a group of people. The focus of Wittgenstein's critique of the Classical View has been to show that the mind of the individual cannot provide that structure. (1991, p. 105)

We are now in a position to see the general structure of Williams' communitarian argument:

- (W1) We have a choice between two pictures of meaning: either the Classical View's or Wittgenstein's alternative.
- (W2) If we accept the Classical View's picture of meaning then we succumb to the Regress Argument and Paradox of Interpretations.
- (W3) If we accept Wittgenstein's alternative, then we must find a way of accounting for the objectivity of rule-following at bedrock level.
- (W4) The objectivity of rule-following at bedrock level can be accounted for only if we presuppose a communal practice. (What this means exactly will be explored in the next section.)
- (W5) Thus, on pain of succumbing to RA and PoI, our picture of meaning requires presupposing a communal practice.

A noteworthy feature of Williams' argument is that it implies that those who hold an individualist view of rules and language must decline Wittgenstein's alternative picture of meaning for that picture presupposes a communal practice, and so they have no choice but to succumb to RA and PoI. Williams' argument thus has the advantage (contra that of her predecessors such as Rhees and Malcolm) of being able to indicate why a community is necessary for our picture of meaning, for without presupposing a community our very notions of language and rules fall into paradox.

However, the crucial premise for Williams' communitarian thesis is (W4), and we can investigate it by asking how a community helps to account for the normativity of rule-following at bedrock level.

#### 4.4.5 The argument for (W4)

We'll start by considering Williams' reasons as to why, under her reading of Wittgenstein, a lifelong solitary cannot engage in a normative practice, i.e., a practice where there is a distinction between correct and incorrect behaviour with regards to a rule or standard. She sets up as her target for discussion the individualist reading proposed by Baker and Hacker:

The crux of the matter turns on whether an isolated individual can engage in behavior that is normatively guided, that goes against a rule or not. In considering such a case, it is important to note that we are concerned with a *radically* isolated individual, that is, someone who has never been in contact with a community. [...] Baker and Hacker, who champion a regularity interpretation of rule-governed activity, see no problem in this, for "... it is his behaviour, including his corrective behavior, which shows both that he is following a rule, and what he counts as following a rule." What is needed for solitary rule-followers are "...regularities in action of sufficient complexity to yield normativity." [...] In holding this, they are maintaining that the distinction between thinking one was following a rule and really following a rule can be displayed in the complex regularities of behaviour of the individual, behaviour that would include corrective behaviour. (1991, p. 109)

Williams' next move is to highlight two points. First, that the identity of Baker and Hacker's Crusoe as a rule follower depends on identifying certain actions of Crusoe as corrective behaviour. And second, the standards for identifying corrective behaviour come from our own practices, such that we can only identify Crusoe's behaviour as corrective by imagining him to be a part of our community and applying our standards of what counts as corrective behaviour to him:

But will this account of practices as "regularities of action" do? Let me first ask the obvious first question. How do we recognize these regularities of sufficient complexity that Baker and Hacker appeal to? What kind of complexity is required? [...] Clearly, the kind of complexity Baker and Hacker are looking for is corrective behavior. But how is corrective behavior to be identified as such? [...] Insofar as our isolated individual's behavior counts as being corrective, it is only in virtue of his behavior being like our own, of assimilating his behavior to our corrective practices. The only standard

available for what counts as corrective behavior, and so *is* corrective behavior, are the paradigms of correcting that inform our practices. Behavior wildly different from our own, bearing no discernible similarity to our practices of correcting, is simply not corrective behavior. [...] It is only in virtue of Robinson Crusoe's *notional* membership in our own community that he can be said to follow rules at all. The normativity of Robinson Crusoe's behavior is derivable not from the mere complexity or publicness of his behavior, but from the assimilation of that behavior to the more complex practices of what we do, practices that distinguish among correcting, modifying and terminating an activity. The individuation and identity of Crusoe's practice requires assimilation to our practices. (1991, pp. 110–111)

The second point bears further discussion. Given that Williams thinks that identifying someone as a rule-follower is based upon identifying particular actions of his as corrective behaviour, we can generalise her point to be that identifying someone as a rule-follower requires applying our standards for what counts as rule-following to him. Now there are three different ways of reading this point, from innocuous to substantive:

- (i) When we judge whether an individual is a rule-follower, we do so by applying our standards for rule-following to him.
- (ii) An individual's identity as a rule follower is constitutively dependent on whether he meets our standards for being a rule-follower.
- (iii) An individual's identity as a rule-follower is constitutively dependent on whether we would judge him as meeting our standards for being a rule-follower.

We can see that (i) is innocuous because it is just an observation of our acts of judging whether a particular entity or action falls under a certain concept. (ii) is more substantive but still fairly innocuous because it is a specific form of the general claim that something falls under a certain concept only if it meets the standards we have for that concept. To be sure, this implies that an object's actually falling under a certain concept is not dependent on whether we as a community would judge it as such, e.g., through some cataclysmic event we as a community might come to possess an inclination to apply 'table' to chairs, but despite this, an object still counts as an chair despite the fact that we would be inclined to judge it as an table. In other words, (ii) subscribes to there being a distinction between

whether an object satisfies the standards for falling under a certain object, and whether we would be inclined to judge that object as satisfying said standards; whether something satisfies the standards is a matter that is judgement-independent. This last point of judgement-independence is the main difference between (ii) and (iii). According to (iii), there is no distinction between whether something satisfies certain standards and whether we would judge it as satisfying those standards. Presumably (iii) is a more radical claim than (ii), for it suggests that our standards do not automatically sort objects in the world independently of our inclinations to apply them to those objects, and so it goes against the idea that we as a community can ever have the wrong inclinations for applying our standards. The possibility of communal error is something that (ii) preserves but (iii) abandons.

We can see that Williams isn't just proposing (i)—although it is an observation that informs the other readings—but she is instead reaching for a more substantive claim. However, Williams isn't very clear on which reading of (ii) or (iii) she subscribes to. In certain places she emphasises the meeting of our criteria (e.g., “the only standard available for what counts as corrective behavior, and so *is* corrective behavior, are the paradigms of correcting that inform our practices”), and in other places she emphasises the act of judging or assimilating Crusoe into our practices by applying our criteria to him (e.g., “The individuation and identity of Crusoe’s practice requires assimilation to our practices” and “That [Crusoe’s] behavior is seen as corrective depends upon how *we*, as a matter of course, would take [his] master-pattern” (1991, p. 111)).

Does Williams wish to propose (iii)? There are two reasons to think not. The first is that it conflicts with her exegetical aims. Given that she wishes to represent Wittgenstein’s position it would be counterintuitive for her to go against Wittgenstein’s emphasis that there is a distinction between whether someone or a community would agree in calling something, say, ‘red’, and whether it is correct to say that it is red, where the former does not entail the latter. For instance, Wittgenstein writes,

You say “*That* is red,” but how is it decided if you are right? Doesn’t human agreement decide?—But do I appeal to this agreement in my judgments of colour? [...] Does human agreement *decide* what is red? Is it decided by appeal to the majority? Were we taught to determine colour in *that* way? (*Zettel* §§429-431)

The second reason is that (iii), as previously mentioned, implies giving up the idea that rules and meaningful expressions dictate a pattern of use that is independent of how we would be inclined to use them. It implies the radical notion that things are not thus unless we as a community would judge that they are thus and so. One of the most salient casualties of this view is the idea that there is a distinction between things seeming to a community to be the case, and it actually being the case—in other words, the ‘seems right / is right’ distinction as applied at the communal level. It would be to accept the early Wright’s claim that “for the community itself there is no authority, so no standard to meet” (1980, p. 220). It is not clear that Williams acknowledges that this is an implication of her communitarian view, and the issue is compounded by the aforementioned discussion that she is ambiguous with regards to whether she is claiming (ii) or (iii).

Given all this, let us attempt to read her as claiming (ii). Does (ii) supply us with a communitarian thesis worthy of consideration? (ii) states that an individual’s identity as a rule-follower constitutively depends on whether he meets our standards for being a rule-follower. Now first we need to make a distinction in how we conceive of the standards and its relation to a community: we could conceive the standards as originating from a community but not mentioning a relation to a community, or that the standards themselves mention having a relationship to a community. For instance, our standards for someone being a rule-follower could be such that the individual must be capable of performing such and such actions under such and such circumstances, and these standards do not require that the individual in question must belong to or be observed by a community. In this case we have standards that originate from a community of rule-followers but do not mention the community. But in the second case our standards for someone being a rule-follower could explicitly require that the individual have a certain relationship with other members of a community. In this second case the standards explicitly mention a relationship with a community.

So how do these two distinctions affect the conceptual possibility of a lifelong solitary rule-follower? In the first distinction, it seems that such an individual is conceptually possible, given that the standards merely originate from a community but make no mention of it, and so a lifelong solitary can produce the required behaviour on his own and so meet our standards for being a rule-follower. However, the same cannot be said in the case of the second distinction, where the standards explicitly state that the individual must

have some relationship with another person. And so the second distinction excludes the conceptual possibility of a lifelong solitary rule-follower.

So it seems that there are two ways of specifying claim (ii): one is merely to say that the relevant standards originate from a community, and the other is to say that the relevant standards mention a relationship with a community. Construed in the first way, claim (ii) hardly amounts to a communitarian position at all, given that a lifelong solitary can very well satisfy our standards for being considered a rule-follower on his own without the need for a community<sup>52</sup>. But construed in the second way, claim (ii) amounts to a communitarian claim that bars the lifelong solitary from achieving the status of rule-follower. So the question is, if Williams wishes to claim (ii) as part of a communitarian thesis, can she also explain to us how the standards for rule-following require a community?

Williams' argument for why they do comes from the following passage, where she talks about how normativity at bedrock level requires a community so that there is room for a contrast between the actions of an individual with the actions of a community:

The central point is that the very idea of normativity, and so the structure within which the distinction between correct and incorrect can be drawn, cannot get a foothold unless the practice is a social one. As a first approximation, the normativity of our bedrock judgments and actions lies in the defeasibility of these judgments, in that one can go wrong. [...] For the defeasibility of our judgments, that is, that judgment can be incorrect, can only get a hold in our being able to contrast the actions of the individual with the actions of the community. It is the very conformity of action and judgment that allows for the possibility of deviation and so incorrect behavior. It is only in conformity and failure to conform that a significant contrast between correct and incorrect action emerges. (1991, pp. 112–113)

So Williams is claiming that there can be no such distinction between correct and incorrect action, and thus normativity, unless there can be a contrast in the actions of an individual

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<sup>52</sup> It should be noted that this position is weaker than even the modest communitarian view, because while modest communitarianism has a proviso that a lifelong solitary can count as a rule-follower on the condition that he is considered in relation to others, this position does not have that proviso. Recall that this position is a species of claim (ii) that subscribes to the judgement-independent account of concepts and so according to it, our standards for rule-following can be satisfied by a lifelong solitary individual without requiring that we consider him in relation to a community.

with that of others. And because the idea of normativity is crucial for rule-following, our standards for rule-following thus require that individuals be a part of some community in order to count as rule-followers.

However, her point that the distinction between correct and incorrect action can only come about through there being a contrast in the actions of an individual with that of others requires substantive clarification and justification that she does not provide. Surely she does not wish to say that the community sets the standards for what is correct or incorrect, for that would be to succumb to the pitfalls of (iii) where there is no ‘seems right / is right’ distinction at the communal level. Given this, perhaps we should then think of the community as providing a framework for contrasts between individuals to emerge so that we can make sense of correct and incorrect behaviour, rather than think of the community as deciding what correct and incorrect behaviour is.

But even if we do charitably grant Williams this, it remains unclear why we should be persuaded to accept the distinction between correct and incorrect action can only come about through there being a contrast in the actions of an individual with that of others. For instance, we might take a page out of Blackburn (see section 1.6.4) and ask why the distinction between correct and incorrect behaviour cannot come about through the contrasts in the behaviour of a single individual across time. If her idea of conformity and deviation is simply the idea that an action matches up or distinguishes itself from a number of other actions made in response to a purported rule or order, then conformity and deviation in action can also be found in the case of a lifelong solitary individual. For instance, a lifelong solitary individual might give himself the instruction to walk to the beach at noon each day, and so there will be many points of comparison constituted by what he does at noon each day to contrast what he does at noon on any particular day. If Williams wishes to exclude such cases from genuine normativity then she needs to tell us what the relevant difference is between the contrast of one individual’s actions with that of his community, and that of an individual’s actions across time, such that the former is conducive to normativity but the latter is not.

To conclude this section, it thus seems we can raise a trilemma for Williams’ communitarian thesis. Her first option is to characterise her thesis along the lines of claim (iii) and accept the radical implication that there is no ‘seems right / is right’ distinction at the communal level, as well as the consequence of betraying her exegetical aim of staying

in line with Wittgenstein on this point. Her second option is to characterise her thesis along the first way of reading claim (ii), in which case her thesis hardly looks like a communitarian one given that a lifelong solitary individual can achieve the status of rule-follower under this reading. Her third option is to characterise her thesis along the second way of reading claim (ii), in which case her argument lacks crucial justification for why a community is necessary for rule-following or meaning.

The overall conclusion of this chapter is that all four of the communitarian arguments considered here fail to convince, each for its own reasons. Broadly speaking, each of these arguments supply a necessary condition for meaning that their authors claim as satisfiable only by an individual who has interacted with another in some way, or who is embedded in a communal practice. However, insufficient explanation was given for why this is so—why only someone with a social history can satisfy their various conditions for meaning. So despite the fact that the arguments presented here are founded upon substantive theoretical considerations, and so were more advanced than those of the pre-KW communitarians, their failing can be broadly construed to be similar: they did not provide adequate justification for their key premises.

## Chapter 5 Quietists

The debate between the individualist and communitarian conceptions of rule-following is the debate on whether the concept of a rule-follower is a concept of something that presupposes more than a single individual. As we have seen, individualists claim that the concept of a rule-follower does *not* presuppose more than one individual while communitarians assert that it does so presuppose. With regards to this debate, there is a third position that I shall call quietism. This is the view that advocates “silence on the much-debated topic of whether community agreement is necessary for rule-following” (Minar, 1994, p. 74), and that “*both* [individualists and communitarians] are mistaken in assuming that there is a determinate positive or negative answer to the question they are pushing” (Gustafsson, 2004, p. 131).

It should be emphasized that the quietism we will be discussing in this chapter relates to the individualist vs. communitarian debate rather than to the issue of what constitutes rule-following or meaning. A quietist of the latter stripe can be found in McDowell, who claims that we should not try to find answers to questions of what constitutes meaning or following a rule, but instead try to diagnose the frames of mind that give rise to such questions in the first place (McDowell, 1991, 1993). However, McDowell would be considered a non-quietist in the sense that this chapter is concerned with, for—as we have seen previously—he advocates a communitarian conception of rule-following.

In this chapter, I shall present and examine Minar’s and Gustafsson’s cases for quietism. I shall argue that they do not succeed in showing that there is no determinate answer to whether the concept of a rule-follower presupposes more than a single individual. Moreover, I shall also indicate how their criticisms of the individualist vs. communitarian debate are founded upon a misunderstanding of what the debate involves, namely that the debate concerns providing necessary and sufficient conditions for rule-following and meaning.

### 5.1 Minar and talking outside of language

To provide an overview of Minar’s argument, Minar claims that both communitarianism and individualism suffer from the same mistaken assumption. This assumption is that Wittgenstein’s problem of interpretation is a coherent problem, and what this means will

be elucidated in the next section. In Minar's reading of Wittgenstein, the problem of interpretation is incoherent, because "Wittgenstein challenges and diagnoses the need for philosophical accounts of the "intelligibility of meaning" (1991, p. 207). According to Minar, a central rational motivation for taking up either individualism or communitarianism comes from thinking that the problem of interpretation is a coherent problem. So by showing how Wittgenstein undermines the coherence of the problem of interpretation, Minar hopes to in turn undermine a central motivation for taking up either individualism or communitarianism.

There are two things worth noting about Minar's argument for quietism. The first is that while Minar considers the coherence of the problem of interpretation as central to taking up either communitarianism or individualism, he thinks that that problem is the *only* rational motivation for communitarianism, while accepting that there might be other reasons for taking up individualism. We will investigate what he has to say of other such motivations for individualism later. The second point to note is that Minar's argument involves quietism in the two senses just discussed: he is advocating quietism in the individualist vs. communitarianism debate on the basis of quietism on the question of what constitutes meaning. This creates an interesting contrast between Minar's position and that of McDowell's, which will be discussed later in our diagnosis of Minar's argument.

### 5.1.1 The problem of interpretation and two kinds of responses to it

So let us begin by introducing what Minar calls the problem of interpretation. This is a philosophical problem about rules that stems from the following thought: How does an expression of a rule determine a particular course of action as being in accord with it, when "[through] reinterpretation, an expression for a rule may be construed as pointing in any direction" (1991, p. 204)? As we noted in previous discussions, we should understand interpretation as the act of appealing to a further expression to supply the first expression its content. So once we are struck by the thought that an expression of a rule is open to multiply diverging interpretations, we must also grant that an action is in accord with that rule-expression only given a particular interpretation of it, and given other interpretations that same action would be in discord with it. Consequently, if an expression of a rule can be interpreted in multiply diverging ways, then it seems that we have the problem of accounting for the determination of a rule, i.e., what actions are in accord or discord with the rule (henceforth called the rule's extension).

So given the susceptibility of our rule-expressions to interpretation, it seems we are faced with a dilemma: either rule-expressions are thoroughly open to interpretation and so any action can be made to be in accord or discord with them, or that there is something that prevents a rule-expression from being susceptible to divergent interpretations and that determines a particular set of actions as being in accord with it. Given that the former choice is disastrous for our ordinary notion of rule-following, it seems that we are forced into finding something that grounds the extension of a rule that is itself immune to divergent interpretation. Minar calls this philosophical problem about rules the ‘problem of interpretation’, so-called because it is the problem that arises once we are struck by the interpretability of rule-expressions and recognise the need to ground their extension through finding something that is immune to misinterpretation. And to reiterate the problem of interpretation suggests that our rules are completely arbitrary unless we find something to determine the extensions of our rules.

Minar thinks that the problem of interpretation is best illustrated through Wittgenstein’s example of the strange pupil of *PI* §185 who has radically different inclinations than us. In *PI* §185 we find a pupil who has successfully developed an arithmetical series according to ‘+2’ up to 1000, but when asked by his teacher to continue the series past ‘1000’ he responds by writing ‘1004, 1008, 1012’. When told by his teacher that this is mistaken, the pupil is bewildered and maintains that he is following the instruction of ‘+2’ just as he had learned throughout his training and has exhibited in previous attempts to follow the instruction. But despite further examples and explanations by the teacher the pupil still does not comprehend why writing ‘1002, 1004, 1006’ is in fact the response that the instruction of ‘+2’ requires:

We say to him: “Look what you have done!”—He doesn’t understand. We say: “You were meant to add *two*; look how you began the series!”—He answers: “Yes, isn’t it right? I thought that was how I was *meant* to do it.”—Or suppose he pointed to the series and said: “But I went on in the same way.”—It would now be no use to say: “But can’t you see....?”—and repeat the old examples and explanations. (*PI* §185)

The problem of appealing to further explanations and examples to ground the extension of an instruction is one that should be familiar, as the same problem was highlighted by KW’s sceptic when he considered the fact that might constitute one’s meaning *plus* by ‘plus’ is the fact that one has internalised the rule for *counting*. KW’s

sceptic responds that his sceptical query can be repeated at this level, simply by asking for the fact that constitutes one's having internalised that rule. In other words, the sceptic can simply ask: what fact about you constitutes your meaning *count* by 'count' instead of *quount*, where "to 'quount' a heap is to count it in the ordinary sense, unless the heap was formed as the union of two heaps, one of which has 57 or more items, in which case one must automatically give the answer '5'" (Kripke, 1982, p. 16)? Moreover, further examples are not up to the task of showing how the rule should be applied because such examples only cover a finite range of cases whereas the extension of '+2' is infinite.

And so the pupil of §185 is able to respond to his teacher's explanations and examples in the same fashion. For instance, the teacher might attempt to explain to the pupil that the instruction of '+2' requires that he should use the same operation for numbers less than 1000 as for numbers more than 1000. However, the pupil can reply that he is indeed doing so, by appealing to an alternative interpretation of 'same operation' that means, e.g., the same operation unless involving numbers with four or more digits. The point is that given that the pupil's training with arithmetic prior to this strange incident has not involved numbers greater than 1000, such interpretations of '+2' or 'same operation' are compatible with the training he has so far received. As such, it seems hopeless to indicate some fact of the pupil's training that demonstrates that his writing '1004, 1008, 1012' constitutes a misunderstanding of the meaning of '+2' or 'same operation', given that his training involved only a finite range of circumstances and there are multiple interpretations of those expressions that are compatible with his training. So, to paraphrase KW, we can say that if '+2' is explained in terms of 'using the same operation', a non-standard interpretation of the latter will yield a non-standard interpretation of the former (Kripke, 1982, p. 16).

So let us clarify what the problem of interpretation amounts to, as illustrated by *PI* §185. Here we have a pupil who has radically different inclinations to respond to training compared to us, and so responds to the instruction of '+2' in an unusual way. His teacher's explanations and examples seem inadequate in communicating to him how he has gone wrong because such explanations are susceptible to deviant interpretations that are compatible with the pupil's actions. Given the susceptibility of the teacher's explanations to misinterpretation, we might be tempted to think that there must be something behind those explanations—perhaps something in the mind of the teacher—that constitutes the correct understanding of '+2' and determines the extension of '+2' in a way that is

immune to misinterpretation. And so, in other words, a problem of communicating to the pupil how he has made a mistake has led to a problem of finding something that determines the extension of a rule in a way that is immune to misinterpretation. The case of the pupil of §185 has hammered home the point that this item that determines the extension of a rule cannot be constituted by our ordinary explanations, reformulations, and examples, for they are open to misinterpretation. Furthermore, the effectiveness of such explanations and examples requires that the subject share certain basic inclinations to respond to training as us, and so they are powerless when dealing with someone like the strange pupil.

What seems to be at stake here is that the problem of interpretation generalises to threaten our notion of rule-following. For if we cannot find something that determines the extensions of our rules in a way that is immune to misinterpretation, then it seems that there are no genuine constraints on what our rules dictate. In other words, the determination of our rules seem arbitrary: what ‘+2’ determines seems to vary according to the basic inclinations of the person acting on it. And so the problem of interpretation can finally be stated as follows: If we wish to avoid our rules being arbitrary, then there must be something that determines the extension of a rule that is immune to misinterpretation, even by beings who do not share our practices and inclinations.

Now suppose that we take the problem of interpretation as coherent. That is, it is coherent to ask for something that can determine the extension of a rule in a way that is immune to misinterpretation. There are two possible avenues of solving it according to Minar’s reading of Wittgenstein. The first is to try and find an item that determines the extension of a rule in a way that is immune to misinterpretation. According to this response, such an item would be what someone who understands a rule or instruction grasps—it is the meaning of the rule, and this presumably cannot be misinterpreted. As Wittgenstein describes this response, it is as if “Every sign is capable of interpretation; but the *meaning* mustn’t be capable of interpretation. It is the last interpretation” (*BB* p. 34). And so, as this response goes, this item is what distinguishes the teacher from the pupil in §185. The teacher has a mental item that constitutes her understanding of ‘+2’ that is immune to misinterpretation and determines ‘1000, 1002, 1004, 1006’ as the correct response to that instruction. In contrast, the pupil does not have this same mental item associated with his understanding of ‘+2’, but if he did, then he would produce the continuation that his teacher intended, performance errors aside.

Minar characterises this response to the problem of interpretation as the idea that one's understanding of a rule is private. It is the idea that what constitutes one's understanding of a rule is something that must be essentially inexpressible, for if it was expressible it would be susceptible to misinterpretation. This inexpressibility is what leads to them being 'private', as Minar notes that "this "content" or "meaning" cannot be adequately specified and so remains incommunicable, private" (1991, p. 216). One important feature of this response involving 'private content' is that it leads to either individualism or communitarianism. For instance, an individualist could argue that it is possible for a lifelong solitary individual to acquire this 'private content', and so a lifelong solitary individual could be a rule-follower. On the other hand, a communitarian might argue that for an individual to acquire such 'private content' it is necessary for him to interact with another individual.

Minar thinks that a significant problem with this 'private content' response lies with its inability to maintain the 'seems right / is right' distinction necessary for meaning. Minar directs our attention to Wittgenstein's claim in *PI* §202 where he says that "it is not possible to obey a rule 'privately': otherwise thinking one was obeying the rule would be the same thing as obeying it." In Minar's reading of this quote and the surrounding passages, Wittgenstein is pointing out that any attempt by the proponent of the 'private content' response to explain how the 'seems right / is right' distinction is maintained will necessarily presuppose concepts intimately related to the concept of rule-following, such as the concept of *sameness of response*:

Any explanation of how a private rule can maintain [the 'seems right / is right'] distinction will once again take for granted notions like sameness of response and accord with rules or interpretations. The application of these concepts, however, is tied to our public rule-following practices, and they have no explanatory priority over the ordinary concept of rules. (1991, p. 216)

The employment of this concept [of sameness of response] relies on picking out relevant dimensions of similarity, an ability just as putatively mysterious as rule-following itself. (1991, p. 222)

However, we should try to get clearer here on whether Minar's objection works. Minar is targeting the proponent of the view that the concept of rule-following is to be explained with reference to a piece of inexpressible content in the rule-follower's mind. Minar's

criticism is that when we ask this proponent to explain how this content is supposed to maintain the ‘seems right / is right’ distinction in one’s attempt to follow the rule, the proponent’s explanation will inevitably rely on concepts that are linked to rule-following. Such reliance is problematic, according to Minar, because the proponent is presupposing concepts linked to the very concept his theory is supposed to explain.

The general thrust of Minar’s criticism here is that if one’s theory is supposed to explain a concept R (e.g., rule-following), and one then is asked how one’s theory preserves certain necessary characteristics of R (e.g., the ‘seems right / is right’ distinction), it is then objectionable to appeal to concepts linked to R (e.g., sameness of response). This being the case, it is nevertheless unclear why such a move is objectionable. Perhaps what Minar finds objectionable is that the theory would be circular—the theory of a concept R would presuppose, if not R itself, then at least concepts linked with R with such intimacy that we would expect the theory to explain them as well, such that if the theory did not explain these linked concepts then we would have grounds for saying that it does not really explain R in the first place.

Unfortunately, if this is the rationale behind Minar's criticism then it does not seem convincing. For even if the proponent of private content must appeal to concepts intimately linked with rule-following to explain the ‘seems right / is right’ distinction, he *does* have an explanation for such concepts, namely by appealing to private content once more. So supposing that we ask the proponent of private content: what makes it the case that an action is the ‘same response’ to a rule as another action, as understood by an individual? The proponent of private content can reply that the individual in question has an understanding of ‘same response’ that, although inexpressible, dictates whether an action is in fact the same response to a rule as another action. In other words, given that the proponent of private content explains rule-following with reference to the notion of private content, why is it then circular if he also appeals to the notion of private content in explaining concepts related to rule-following? To be sure, I do not think that the ‘private content’ response is correct, but only that there is no obvious circularity in it, as Minar seems to suggest.

We will move on to canvass what Minar believes is the second type of response to the problem of interpretation. The second type of response is that we should think that the determination of a rule’s extension is to be explained via the agreement or regularity of a

community, where “community agreement represents a condition on the possibility of identifying actions as correct or incorrect” (1991, p. 218). Thus, communitarianism seems to be an option for responding to the problem of interpretation. However, it is worth noting that individualism can also appropriate the basic structure of this kind of response. Instead of suggesting that community agreement or regularity is necessary for determining the extension of a rule, it can be claimed that regularity of sufficient complexity in an individual’s behaviour can also be enough for giving his rule a determinate extension. For example, this kind of individualist response is suggested by Baker and Hacker (1990, p. 176).

In his effort to examine such a view, Minar examines a number of different communitarian authors such as Malcolm, Stroud, and Williams. We won’t go into the specifics of Minar’s criticisms of each of them, but instead try to paint the general outline of his overall complaint against such views<sup>53</sup>. The primary complaint Minar directs against such views is that they fail to provide the very explanations they aspire to. In Minar’s eyes, communitarian views are supposed to answer the problem of interpretation by providing an explanation of how a rule determines its extension by appealing to things that are not susceptible to the problem of interpretation, such as “shared habits, judgments, or speech dispositions” (1991, p. 222).

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<sup>53</sup> Minar’s criticisms of these authors can be found as follows: for Malcolm, see (1991, pp. 218–221); for Stroud, see (1995, pp. 423–424); for Williams, see (1995, pp. 434–437). There are significant differences between his treatments of Malcolm and Williams compared to mine. For instance, Minar takes Malcolm’s communitarian position to be responding to the problem of interpretation (1991, p. 220), where community agreement is supposed to address a need to find something that determines the extension of a rule in a way that is immune to misinterpretation. However, as we saw in section 2.2, Malcolm was not concerned with anything resembling the problem of interpretation, and instead relates his emphasis on communal agreement towards providing for the ‘seems right / is right’ distinction. Additionally, none of the quotes that Minar takes from Malcolm indicate a concern with interpretation. Regarding Williams, Minar complains that Williams’ argument against the possibility of a lifelong solitary rule-follower relies on artificially describing such an individual in terms that do not presuppose any normativity. For instance, Williams describes such an individual as inhabiting an “impoverished world” where ‘impoverished’ implies that there is no context for normative terms of assessment to be applied to his behaviour (Minar, 1995, p. 436). Given this, Minar points out that Williams’ own move can be turned against her, for a community could also be described in such normativity-free terms and so we would not have any more grounds for saying that anyone in the community follows a rule. However, as we saw in section 4.4.4, Williams does not merely rely on under-description in her argument. Rather, her argument relies on showing how a community is required to provide for what she calls the necessity and normativity of rules at bedrock level. So Minar seems to misapprehend Williams’ actual communitarian argument: the lifelong solitary is ‘impoverished’ because there is no room for the necessity and normativity of rules at bedrock level, not simply because he is described in terms that do not presuppose normativity.

However, Minar wishes to point out that even the resources that the communitarian appeals to, e.g., *sameness of response* or *agreement*, are in actuality vulnerable to the same problem of interpretation just as rule-expressions are:

To say, for example, that someone understands “+2” because he or she for the most part responds as the members of the community do in the same circumstances, takes for granted a notion of sameness of response. The employment of this concept relies on picking out relevant dimensions of similarity, an ability just as putatively mysterious as rule-following itself. (1991, p. 222)

In other words, the problem for communitarians is that they wish to account for the determination of, say ‘+2’, by appealing to the actions that are in agreement with one’s community members in using ‘+2’. However, the same problem can be applied at this level: what determines which actions are ‘in agreement with one’s community members’? Thus, the same kind of problem of interpretability can arise with ‘similar response’ or ‘agreement’, just as it can with ‘+2’. Consequently, Minar believes that communitarian views fail to live up to their own expectations, because their conviction that communal agreement or shared dispositions were somehow less problematic than appeals to rules or meaning is mistaken.

However, on further inspection, it is not clear that Minar’s objection hits its mark. This is because the communitarian view he is criticising does not need to *mention* ‘agreement’, or ‘sameness of response’ in their answer to what determines the extension of ‘+2’. Instead, they might simply *use* the notion of agreement or sameness of response. The problem of interpretation of ‘+2’ applies to ‘agreement’ or ‘sameness of response’ if we assume that those expressions possess determinate content. If we did so assume, then it would be appropriate to ask: what determines whether ‘agreement’ means *agreement* or *quagreement* (where this is some deviant notion of *agreement*)? But the communitarian does not need to assume that ‘agreement’ already possesses determinate content independently of how he and his community are disposed to apply that expression. Instead, the communitarian can reply that what determines the standards of correctness for ‘agreement’ is how the community agrees in their dispositions to use that expression. In other words, the agreement need not be agreement in judgments but in blind inclinations to act. Now of course, such a blunt communitarian view would be open to objections against

dispositionalism, but the point here is that it is not obvious that it succumbs to Minar's objection that it presupposes an answer to the problem of interpretation at a different level.

But here Minar might reply, even if the communitarian isn't assuming that 'agreement' means *agreement*, isn't he still helping himself to the notion of *agreement*, a notion that certain actions are of the same type with others, and this is analogous to helping oneself to the idea that certain actions are in accord with *addition*? The communitarian might have to concede this, but the onus is on Minar to explain how this is illegitimate in light of the problem of interpretation. Recall that when KW formulates his problem of interpretation, he explicitly states that he does not wish to raise a sceptical problem about arithmetic (see section 1.2)—instead he grants at the outset the notion that 68 *plus* 57 yields 125. Similarly, the problem of interpretation can be said to grant the notion that certain actions are of the *same* type as others. The challenge of the problem of interpretation is rather the challenge of whether 'agreement' refers to or means *that* notion<sup>54</sup>.

Nevertheless, the important point that Minar wants to make from all of this is that if one believes that the problem of interpretation is coherent, there seems to be only two kinds of responses to it, and both of these responses lead to either individualism or communitarianism. However, Minar believes that the problem of interpretation is incoherent, and he will now try to show why.

### 5.1.2 The incoherence of the problem of interpretation

So what is Minar's objection against the coherence of the problem of interpretation? Recall that the problem asks for something that can determine the extensions of our rules while at the same time being discernible to someone who shares none of our basic inclinations, like the recalcitrant pupil of §185. In other words, the problem assumes that

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<sup>54</sup> One way in which Minar might respond to this is to claim that KW's sceptic only grants the notion of *addition* at the outset, for the sceptic's conclusion ultimately repudiates the notion that *adding* 68 to 57 yields 125. This is because it makes no sense to claim that there is the concept of *addition* that determines whether certain responses to arithmetical queries are in compliance with it, while holding that we can never mean *addition* by our expressions nor follow the rule *addition* (since to follow a rule requires that we mean it by an expression or have the rule in mind). This way of understanding the sceptical challenge is presented by Miller: "The idea of a rule with determinate compliance conditions that cannot (even in principle) be followed is clearly regarded by Kripke as paradoxical" (2015, p. 334 n.4). This is a complicated issue that we won't discuss further, for there are two sub-issues involved here, namely a substantive issue, i.e., whether KW's sceptical challenge—if successful—necessarily repudiates the idea that certain actions conform to the rule of *addition*, and an exegetical issue, i.e., whether KW really did think that his sceptical challenge—if successful—necessarily repudiates that idea.

[T]he sense and propriety of our ways of going on, and thus the intelligibility of our practices, and thus our capacity to make sense, are read as having to be potentially discernible to an outsider, no matter how different that outsider may be from us. (1995, p. 438)

However, the very idea that we can conceive a problem about what gives our signs their meanings from a perspective outside our rule-following and language practices as a whole is something that Minar wishes to criticise as incoherent:

If we could *really* manage to begin from a *wholly* external position, we would remain unable to conceive of a general problem about how signs get their meaning: From this “detached perspective”, where use as “what comes natural” (§185) is treated as mere psychology, that is as mere behavior, meaning would no longer show up in the use of signs. We could discern no more than regularity in behavior and, perhaps, accompanying psychological phenomena. The *need* for more would become incomprehensible, not because the behavior was seen as already meaningful or subject to norms, but precisely because it was not. If this conclusion is correct, then the problem of the life of the sign is, from this point of view, inapplicable; there is no such thing. (1995, p. 442)

And again:

“When we try to *begin* externally, we may see our relation to language as something that has to be cemented, as it were accomplished by spiriting something into the signs. But, again if we begin externally, we will not see the meaning in the uses of expressions, because we have abstracted from the conditions in which they are used.”(1990, p. 317)

For the sake of clarity, Minar’s argument can be structured as a *reductio* as follows:

- (E1) We can coherently conceive a problem about what determines the extensions of our rule-expressions from a perspective outside our rule-following and language practices as a whole. (E.g., “Is there anything that transcends our basic inclinations and practices that can determine the extensions of our rule-expressions?”)
- (E2) But in order to conceive of such a problem, we need to perceive the rule-expressions as already possessing extensions. (E.g., From a perspective that transcends our basic inclinations and practices, to raise the problem of what

determines the extension of, say, '+2', requires that we view the sign as having determinate extension. After all, it is only because we view the sign as determining '1000, 1002, 1004 ...' that we can ask what gives it that particular extension).

- (E3) However, from a perspective outside our practices as a whole, we will not be able to perceive our rule-expressions as possessing extensions.
- (E4) So from a perspective outside our practices as a whole, we cannot coherently conceive a problem about what determines the extensions of our rule-expressions.
- (E5) Thus, reject (1): It is *not* the case that we can coherently conceive a problem about what determines the extensions of our rule-expressions from a perspective outside our rule-following and language practices as a whole.

Given that (E1) is a statement to the effect that it is coherent to raise the problem of interpretation, it follows from this argument that we must reject the coherence of the problem of interpretation.

A key feature of Minar's argument is that we cannot raise questions about meaning when we take up a perspective external to our practices *as a whole*. This is because when we take up such a perspective, all of our signs appear meaningless and we cannot ask what determines the extension of an expression while simultaneously viewing that expression as extension-less. However, even if we grant Minar this notion, we should ask if it is really necessary to take up an external perspective to our practices *as a whole*, as opposed to a section of it, in order to raise the problem of interpretation. Recall that the problem of interpretation states: If we wish to prevent our rules from being arbitrary, then there must be something that determines the extension of a rule that is immune to misinterpretation, even by beings who do not share our practices and inclinations.

A possible way of asking the problem of interpretation without taking a perspective outside our practices as a whole can be found in KW. Recall that KW raises a sceptical worry about rules by taking a perspective outside our practices *in the past*, while maintaining a perspective inside our practices *in the present*:

For the sceptic to converse with me at all, we must have a common language. So I am supposing that the sceptic, provisionally, is not questioning my *present* use of the word 'plus'; he agrees that, according to my *present* usage, '68 plus 57' denotes 125. Not only does he agree with me on this, he conducts the entire debate with me in my language as I *presently* use it. He merely questions whether my present usage agrees with my past usage, whether I am *presently* conforming to my *previous* linguistic intentions. (1982, p. 12)

By talking about past meaning, KW momentarily grants that the signs he uses at present possess determinate extensions, and simply asks what facts determined the extensions of his signs as he used them at a previous point in time. It seems that KW was himself aware of a worry that was similar to Minar's, when he writes "I put the problem in this way so as to avoid confusing questions about whether the discussion is taking place 'both inside and outside language' in some illegitimate sense" (1982, p. 12). And to be sure, simply restricting the question to past usages of signs does not prevent the result from generalising to affect present usages of signs, for "if there can be no fact about which particular function I meant in the past, there can be none in the present either" (1982, p. 13)

Can this move be appropriated by the defender of the problem of interpretation in the face of Minar's criticism? It seems so. Recall that for Minar, the incoherence of the problem of interpretation was that it requires us to perceive a rule-expression as simultaneously possessing and not possessing extensions. But we can avoid this incoherence by taking up an external perspective only for our practices in the past, while maintaining an internal perspective on our present practices. In other words, we are perceiving a token of a rule-expression, e.g., '+2' at  $t_{\text{past}}$  as lacking extension, while perceiving another token of the same rule-expression, e.g., '+2' at  $t_{\text{present}}$  as possessing extension. Thus, there is a way of raising the problem of interpretation about a sign without perceiving that sign as simultaneously possessing and lacking an extension, which would succumb to incoherence. Rather, we can raise the problem of interpretation about a sign by perceiving a token of that sign as lacking an extension while simultaneously perceiving another token of that sign as possessing an extension, analogous to what KW does.

What can Minar say in reply? In order to counter this manoeuvre, Minar might claim that problems about the meaning of a sign necessarily apply for the totality of the sign's

use rather than its use at any particular moment, and so we cannot simply isolate a particular instance of a sign's use and ask what determines its extension at that moment. In other words, to think that we can isolate the use of a sign in the past and restrict our query to that point in time assumes that whatever answers we find will not necessarily affect the meanings of that sign in the present.

However, is it true that problems about the meaning of a sign at a particular time necessarily apply for the totality of that sign's use? That is, if a sign-token lacks extension, does that logically entail that all tokens of that sign type lack extension? I don't think that such entailment is obvious. For such entailment depends on the reason for the sign token lacking extension. We can grant that if the reasoning for sign-token of '+2' at  $t_{\text{past}}$  lacking extension has nothing to do with context of use or the person using it, then it seems that the reasoning can generalise to imply that '+2' at  $t_{\text{present}}$  also lacks extension.

But what if the reasoning for the sign token of '+2' at  $t_{\text{past}}$  lacking extension is sensitive to context of use? That is, one might argue that there is something unique about the use of '+2' at  $t_{\text{past}}$  that results in it lacking extension, but this does not necessarily imply that all uses of '+2' thereby lack extension. For instance, one might try to raise scepticism about the meaning of past extensions in the pursuit of a theory of meaning within an ontology of presentism, according to which only present uses of expressions possess meaning.

In reply to this Minar might argue that there is nothing within the problem of interpretation that restricts its reach to only past instances of meaning; we have good grounds for believing that in raising the problem of interpretation, our sceptical line of inquiry about past meaning will also jeopardise present and future meaning. So we cannot simply raise the problem with respect to the use of a sign in the past because we are in effect also raising scepticism about our use of a sign in the present. In other words, we are undermining the ground we stand on; we need to assume that our current uses of words are meaningful in order to raise the problem of interpretation, but the problem attacks the very notion that our current uses of words are meaningful in the first place.

However, this reply trades on the assumption that the problem of interpretation can only be construed as an attack on the notion that our words are meaningful. But why should we not instead think that what the problem really attacks is an *understanding* of how words are meaningful? After all, the conclusion of KW is not that our words are

meaningless once we accept his sceptic's conclusion, but that we must shift our paradigm of meaning ascriptions from those of truth conditions to assertability conditions. Consequently, there is no need to think that we are undermining the ground we stand on when we raise the problem of interpretation, for we can see ourselves as merely questioning a particular conception of meaning; the most that can be said is that we are undermining a way of *conceiving* the ground we stand on. Thus, we can accept that raising a problem about the meaning of a sign at a particular time in the past might very well have consequences for the meaning of that sign in the present, but this need not be detrimental for our purposes, for the goal of such questioning can be to draw attention to our understanding of meaning.

### 5.1.3 Minar's characterisation of communitarian and individualist views

However, even if we grant that Minar is right that it is incoherent to raise the problem of interpretation, does this entail that we should adopt a quietist position on the individualist vs. communitarian debate? Let us first tackle Minar's reason for thinking that the only rational motivation for taking a *communitarian view* comes from taking the problem of interpretation as coherent, and so according to them we must attempt to provide something that can determine the extension of a rule in a way that is immune to misinterpretation. In Minar's estimation, communitarian views claim that

Shared practices or dispositions or responses are supposed to play a fundamental, constitutive, or grounding role in meaning and rule-following. *Any community agreement view worthy of the name* [emphasis added] is under an obligation to provide a workable explanation of what that fundamental role is supposed to be. (1995, p. 424)

However, it must be noted that if such is the criteria for what qualifies as a communitarian view, then some of the views commonly regarded as communitarian must be excluded. This is because there are a number of communitarian authors who shun the project of giving an account of what constitutes or determines rule-following and meaning. For instance, KW believes that we cannot give necessary and sufficient conditions for meaning plus by '+' in terms that do not presuppose content. This is because KW recognises that if he were to propose a straight solution in terms of agreement with one's community, then the problem of interpretation can be applied to 'agreement' just as it can be applied to '+' (Kripke, 1982, p. 146).

In Minar's defence, however, he does recognise that KW's communitarian sceptical solution "does not (and cannot) say that community agreement determines facts of meaning". However, Minar maintains that his argument against straight communitarianism "will for the most part apply, with modification, to [KW's] skeptical solution" because KW's view shares three things in common with straight communitarianism that does attempt to say what determines facts of meaning:

[KW's sceptical solution] shares with [straight communitarian views] several very general, but crucial, features. First, both purport to give a new kind of answer to some putatively clear question about the nature of meaning, whereas on my reading, Wittgenstein challenges and diagnoses the need for philosophical accounts of the "intelligibility of meaning" by redescribing the materials which initiate the problems they are supposed to address. Second, on both, descriptions couched in terms of community are supposed to be in some sense more fundamental or basic than more straightforward tellings of what we do. Third, both picture our relation to our practices as one of confinement in them. (1991, p. 207)

Let's examine these three points in turn. Minar's first point is that while KW's sceptical solution avoids giving us a constitutive account of meaning and rules, KW never undermines the coherence of the problem of interpretation, and instead offers a concessionary response after failing to find a straight solution to it. Thus, KW's sceptical solution shares the same fault as straight communitarian solutions, namely that they both accept the coherence of the problem of interpretation.

However, as we saw in the previous section, Minar's argument against the coherence of the problem of interpretation was left wanting. As indicated, there is a way of raising the problem without succumbing to incoherence. Thus, even if KW is in the same boat as straight communitarian solutions, it does not seem that Minar's criticism against the latter amounts to much of a threat against the former.

On Minar's second point, presumably Minar intends to draw our attention to the fact that KW's sceptical solution attempts to explain the justification of rule-following ascriptions by appealing to the assertability conditions of a community, where this explanation is intended by KW to be somehow 'more fundamental or basic' in an intuitive sense than our ordinary justifications for rule-following ascriptions. So in Minar's eyes,

KW shares in the same fault as straight communitarian solutions, namely that of trying to provide ‘deeper’ explanations of our rule-following practices. However, even if Minar’s charge that KW’s sceptical solution has this feature in common with straight communitarian solutions, Minar needs to explain why it is a fault. According to Minar, the drive to offer more fundamental or basic explanations of our rule-following practices is due to taking the problem of interpretation as coherent. And so if Minar can undermine the coherence of the problem, he thereby also undermines the drive to offer more fundamental explanations of our rule-following practices. Unfortunately, however, Minar was unsuccessful in undermining the coherence of the problem, and so it does not seem that Minar has successfully shown why KW’s attempt to explain rule-following ascriptions in more fundamental or basic terms is misguided.

On Minar’s third point, it would help to have some background on what he means by ‘picturing our relation to our practices as one of confinement in them’. In Minar’s line of thought, once we recognise the failure of finding something external to our practices that can ground the extension of a rule, we might think that we have to settle for what is internal to our practices to account for our rules. This concession of failure makes it seem that we must ‘confine’ our account of rule-following to appeal to things within our practices, and thus settle for a ‘second-best answer’. Granted, this description seems applicable to KW, who recognises the failure of finding facts that would constitute someone’s following a rule, and so settles for the assertability conditions of a community to explain the ‘seems right / is right’ distinction in rule-following.

However, Minar wishes to argue that this description of being confined to one’s practice rests on an incoherence, for it assumes that we can make sense of a position external to our practices from which meaning can be viewed:

We challenge the philosopher’s first step, the idea that something amiss with our ordinary techniques of following rules needs to be removed before our use of rules or other expressions is certified. Such an apparent difficulty with what we do, notice, could only be removed “from the outside”; this suggests why appeals to community to solve the philosopher’s problem (by, for examples, telling us that community is “enough”) are bound to seem skeptical, to “confine” us to the “inside” [...] Wittgenstein questions whether we have the resources to make any sense of the imagined content of the fantasy of an “outside position.” (1991, p. 230)

Minar claims that it does not make sense to think that there is an external perspective from which we can raise and answer questions about meaning, and so we should not think that we are settling for a ‘second-best answer’ when we confine ourselves to a perspective internal to our practices. However, Minar’s justification for this claim rests on his argument that one cannot raise questions about meaning from an external perspective, and this has been shown to be unsuccessful. Thus, after examining Minar’s three points of contention with KW’s sceptical solution, we can see that each relies on her argument against straight communitarian solutions, and given that the latter is not successful, it seems that Minar does not have a persuasive case against KW.

We can move on to contrast Minar with another view that also wishes to reject the problem of interpretation, namely McDowell’s. As we saw in section 4.3.1., McDowell rejects a fundamental assumption of the problem of interpretation, namely that understanding fundamentally involves interpretation. And recall that he rejects this on the basis that it is “quite counterintuitive, not something on which a supposed need for constructive philosophy could be convincingly based” (1993, p. 272). Another point of similarity is that McDowell also criticises the coherence of searching for facts that determine meaning in a perspective external to our practices:

In theorizing about the relation of our language to the world, we must start in the middle, already equipped with command of a language; we cannot refrain from exploiting that prior equipment, in thinking about the practice, without losing our hold on the sense that the practice makes. (1981, p. 330)

So as a result, McDowell’s response to the problem of interpretation compares quite similarly to Minar’s, in the sense that they both consider the problem of interpretation as relying on incoherent demands.

Given these similarities, it is striking to note that McDowell reaches a communitarian conclusion whilst Minar reaches a quietist one. Unfortunately, Minar does not devote much to discussing McDowell’s position, besides acknowledging it as a communitarian view (1991, pp. 231–232 n.11). However, even if we grant that Minar has some plausible replies to McDowell on the necessity of a community for rule-following, one can point out a tension in Minar’s characterisation of communitarianism. For given that Minar has said that communitarian views are the product of taking the problem of interpretation as coherent, how can he acknowledge McDowell’s position as communitarian when

McDowell, like Minar, rejects the problem of interpretation as a non-starter? Recall in section 4.3.1 that McDowell rejects the ‘master thesis’ that understanding fundamentally requires interpretation, and so McDowell would rather dissolve the problem of interpretation at the outset than take it as a well-motivated problem deserving of a solution. And so it thus seems that we can sketch a dilemma for Minar here: either Minar regards McDowell’s position as communitarian, in which case Minar must relinquish his main claim that communitarianism is a product of taking the problem of interpretation as coherent, or Minar chooses to revise his opinion on McDowell’s position and label it as non-communitarian, in which case Minar needs substantive reasons for doing so in order to avoid making an *ad hoc* manoeuvre to save his main claim about the motivations of communitarianism.

So far we have been discussing Minar’s characterisation of communitarianism in relation to his quietist argument, where he claims that a necessary motivation for taking a communitarian view is that one takes the problem of interpretation as coherent. We can now move on to his characterisation of individualism. Does Minar believe that individualism is also necessarily motivated in the same way and so vulnerable to his quietist argument for the same reasons as communitarianism? It does not seem so. On the one hand he acknowledges that there are some individualist views who take themselves to be providing a response to a problem about rules, e.g., Baker and Hacker (Minar, 1991, p. 232 n.16), and so presumably Minar’s criticisms of the coherence of an external position would apply to them. However, his main contention against individualism is a general one that applies to the debate between individualism and communitarianism: they all assume that the criteria for being a rule-follower covers any and all possible cases, such that there is a determinate answer to whether someone is following a rule in every possible scenario involving an individual:

I am also not claiming that the “isolated individual” can follow rules. (In fact, I suspect that the issue is confused; in part because it encourages us to take rule-following as a uniform phenomenon and treats rule-following in abstraction from the places of particular rule-governed activities in our “form of life.” To put the matter very roughly, I would suggest that the idea that the issue can be settled one way or another begs the question; it takes for granted that our criteria for rule-following can be extended to cover any unanticipated case that may arise.) (1991, p. 223)

But do the proponents of the debate need to be committed to the strong claim that “our criteria for rule-following can be extended to cover any unanticipated case that may arise”? In effect, the commitment is to the claim that the concept of a rule-follower is a concept that possesses necessary and sufficient conditions for its application in every possible scenario. However, as mentioned in the introduction, the debate between communitarianism and individualism is merely the debate on whether there is a particular necessary condition on rule-following, i.e., whether more than one person is required for an individual to follow a rule. As such, participants from both sides need not be committed to the existence of any sufficient conditions for being a rule-follower. Consequently, neither party needs to hold the idea that there is a determinate answer to whether someone is following a rule in every possible scenario involving an individual.

To conclude this section on Minar, we can reiterate the main points of the discussion. Minar’s fundamental point is that many proponents of the debate between communitarianism and individualism consider the problem of interpretation as coherent, and so they try to find something from a perspective external to our practices that can determine the extension of our rules in a way that is immune to misinterpretation. However, Minar believes that the problem is incoherent, and so, for these proponents at least, there is no reason to take up the positions they hold. Unfortunately for Minar, we were able to defuse Minar’s argument for the incoherence of the problem of interpretation by appealing to a move made by KW when he set out the terms of his sceptical challenge. Nevertheless, even if Minar’s argument was a success, he still faces further difficulties in addressing communitarian views such as McDowell’s that—like Minar—reject the problem of interpretation at the outset rather than attempt to treat it as a coherent and well-motivated problem. Additionally, Minar’s main point of contention against individualism and the debate in general, i.e., that they assume that the concept of rule-following has necessary and sufficient conditions, was shown to be tangential to concerns of the debate itself.

## 5.2 Gustafsson and the inerrant Platonist

Gustafsson’s argument for being a quietist in the communitarianism vs. individualism debate follows a general pattern similar to Minar’s, in the sense that they both try to identify the motivations for taking up a position on the debate and then attempt to undermine them. Gustafsson devotes more effort to undermining communitarianism than

individualism, and so we shall start by examining Gustafsson's diagnosis of communitarian views. It should also be noted that while Gustafsson's focus appears exegetical, in the sense that he views the debate in relation to whether Wittgenstein should be read as communitarian or individualist, his arguments for quietism have merit independent of the concern with Wittgenstein's own position. Given the above, I shall ultimately argue that Gustafsson does not succeed in undermining the motivations for taking up a position on the individualist vs. communitarian debate.

### 5.2.1 The tension in rule-following as motivation for communitarianism

Gustafsson believes that a central motivation for reading Wittgenstein as proposing a communitarian view is that it would resolve a tension between two strands of thought in Wittgenstein's considerations on rule-following. These two strands of thought are as follows:

There are two strands in Wittgenstein's discussions of rule-following that may seem difficult to reconcile. The first is his apparent wish to dissolve the idea that what is and is not in accordance with a rule is somehow fixed in splendid isolation from the fact that we, in actual cases, call certain behaviours 'in accordance with the rule' and other behaviours 'not in accordance with the rule'. Wittgenstein seems to want to claim that in abstraction from such case-to-case verdicts, the notion of 'acting in accordance with a rule', and, hence, the notion of 'rule' itself, evaporate.

The second strand is his insisting that there is a difference between obeying a rule and thinking that one is obeying a rule. 'So-and-so is in accordance with the rule' and 'so-and-so seems to be in accordance with the rule' are not the same. According to Wittgenstein, a satisfactory clarification of rule-following must not allow this distinction to collapse. (2004, pp. 125–126)

So let us specify more clearly what the two strands in tension are in Wittgenstein's discussions of rule-following, according to Gustafsson:

- (a) (*We should reject the 'Platonist'<sup>55</sup> conception of rules*): We should dissolve the idea that what is and is not in accordance with the rule is somehow determined in

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<sup>55</sup> The term 'Platonist' is also used by Gustafsson to describe this conception of rules (2004, p. 133).

splendid isolation from the fact that we call certain behaviours ‘in accordance with the rule’ and certain other behaviours ‘not in accordance with the rule’.

(b) (*Rule-following has a ‘seems right/ is right’ distinction*): There is a conceptual distinction between obeying a rule and thinking that one is obeying the rule.

Given these two ideas, there seem to be an obvious tension between them, for if what is in accordance with a rule is dependent on whether we would call something in accord with a rule, how can the ‘seems right / is right’ distinction be preserved? As Gustafsson rightly notes,

Why may these two strands appear difficult to reconcile? Well, the problem is that our calling certain behaviours ‘in accordance with the rule’ and other behaviours ‘not in accordance with the rule’ can only, it seems, exhibit what we *think* acting in accordance with a rule consists in. Such verdicts, one wants to say, only express what *appears* to us to be in accordance with the rule. Consequently, if what is involved in obeying a rule cannot be separated from what we call ‘acting in accordance with the rule’ and ‘going against it’ in actual cases, it is difficult to see how the distinction between obeying a rule and thinking that one is obeying a rule can be sustained. (2004, p. 126)

It may be worth drawing a connection between Gustafsson and Minar at this juncture for comparative purposes and also to situate (a) and (b) within a broader framework. Recall that Minar reads Wittgenstein’s discussion of rule-following to revolve around the problem of interpretation, i.e., the problem of finding something to ground the determination of a rule that is immune to misinterpretation. Also in Minar’s reading, taking the problem of interpretation as coherent leads to two different types of solutions. The first type of solution is the ‘private content’ response, where something in the mind of an individual rule-follower is able to account for how rules determine their extensions in a way that is immune to misinterpretation but where this understanding is essentially inexpressible and thus private. The second type of response appeals not to something private in the mind of the individual rule-follower but to communal agreement, and posits that the determination of a rule’s extension is to be explained via the agreement or regularity of a community where that rule is followed.

Now the ‘private content’ response can be likened to what Gustafsson is calling the ‘Platonist’ conception of rules. The ‘private content’ response holds that the private mental

item that is responsible for determining the extension of a rule is immune to misinterpretation. Similarly, a ‘Platonist’ conception of rules conceives of rules as abstract and non-spatiotemporal objects that exist independently of our thoughts and actions. Given this, to understand the rule of , say, *add 2*, is to have a sort of link in one’s mind with an abstract and independently existing entity that determines—among other things—the continuation ‘1000, 1002, 1004...’ in a way that is immune to misinterpretation. Thus, one can think of Gustafsson’s (a) as being the rejection of the ‘private content’ response that featured in Minar’s discussion.

A second parallel with Minar concerns what to do once we have rejected the ‘private content’ response or the Platonist conception of rules. In Minar’s discussion, if we maintain that the problem of interpretation requires a straight solution then we might think that communal agreement is fundamental to the determination of a rule. Similarly, in Gustafsson’s reading, the attempt to hold both (a) and (b) leads one to take up a communitarian view<sup>56</sup> of rules.

We can now observe how communitarian readings attempt to resolve the tension between (a) and (b). According to Gustafsson, communitarian readings of Wittgenstein generally believe Wittgenstein to be claiming that the “distinction [between ‘seems right’ and ‘is right’] can be made sense of only if the individual is in agreement with some community of rule-followers as to whether doing such-and-such is or is not obeying a certain rule” (2004, p. 133). So with regards to (a) and (b), Gustafsson believes that communitarians propose an amended reading of them: community view readings propose that we understand (a) as stating that we reject the idea that the determination of a rule is independent of what most members of a community would agree on as what the rule determines, and that we understand (b) as applying to individuals in a community:

[According to community view interpretations], what Wittgenstein wants to dissolve is the idea that what is in accordance with a rule is independent of *what all (or nearly all) members of a community* agree on, whereas what he wants to sustain is the distinction between obeying a rule and thinking that one is obeying the rule *as applied to any particular individual* within a community. As Malcolm puts it, Wittgenstein’s claim is only that what is and is not in

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<sup>56</sup> Gustafsson’s characterisation of a communitarian view here does not distinguish between straight and sceptical variants of communitarianism. As we shall see, he makes an objection against a straight version of communitarianism that can be avoided by sceptical versions.

accordance with a rule is independent of ‘me, or of any particular person’. He is *not* claiming that it is independent of the community as a whole. Hence, there is no conflict between (a) and (b). (2004, p. 134)

Gustafsson makes note of numerous issues with community view interpretations of Wittgenstein, such as that it “appears to ascribe to Wittgenstein the idea that it makes no sense to assume that everyone (or nearly everyone) in a community are mistaken about what is and is not in accordance with a certain rule” (2004, p. 135). Another issue is that if one thinks that the verdicts or agreement in dispositions of a community are a necessary intermediary between a rule and what accords with it, then this gets us no further in solving the problem of interpretation. As Gustafsson notes,

If the rule is always open to interpretation, then so are those verdicts. So, if one claims that the verdicts of my peers are needed to forge a link between the rule and what accords with it, then one must also claim that a second group of verdicts are needed to make it possible for those first verdicts to play that kind of role. And now, it is clear that we have a vicious regress on our hands. (2004, p. 136)

We do not need to evaluate Gustafsson’s criticisms of communitarian views as our focus is on his quietism. However, a general comment can be made with regards to the two canvassed here. With regards to the first criticism, the communitarian views that would succumb to it would be ones attempting to give straight solutions to the problem of interpretation, where facts about communal agreement in judgments or dispositions are supposed to determine what is or is not in accord with a rule. Such straight solutions would have to concede that, since they claim that the community decides how a rule should be followed, it makes no sense to say that the community as a whole is mistaken in their understanding of a rule. However, a sceptical communitarian view such as KW’s would not have to concede this, since it does not aspire to explain what determines the correctness conditions of a rule.

With regards to the second criticism, it is arguable that we can bring in the use / mention distinction just as we did against Minar in section 5.1.2. Gustafsson’s criticism would apply to a view that claimed, e.g., that what is in accord with the rule of ‘add 2’ is what is in accord with the rule of ‘respond in the way that agrees with how most members of one’s community would respond when asked to ‘add 2’’. This is because the problem of

interpretation can be raised with respect to the expressions in that statement; what determines whether ‘agrees’ means *agree* or *quagree* (some deviant notion of *agreement*)? However, the criticism would not apply to a view that claimed, e.g., that the responses that are in accord with the rule of ‘add 2’ are the responses that agree with the dispositions of most of one’s community members.

However, what I would like to focus on now is what Gustafsson has to say after dismissing community view interpretations. If the main motivation for adopting communitarianism is to dissolve the tension between (a) and (b), and it is claimed that communitarianism should be abandoned, then how do we resolve that tension? This argument is crucial for Gustafsson’s case for quietism, because if he cannot show how this tension can be resolved without appealing to communitarianism, then he would be leaving the door open for other variants of communitarianism to emerge in response to the tension, such as ones that involve sceptical solutions or dissolutions of the problem of interpretation.

### 5.2.2 Gustafsson’s attempt at resolving the tension

I would like to discuss Gustafsson’s own method of resolving the tension between (a) and (b). Having dismissed community view readings as inherently problematic, Gustafsson gives us a sketch of how he thinks the tension ought to be resolved. I will proceed by first outlining Gustafsson’s response before going through it in more detail.

First, Gustafsson believes we need to consider why Wittgenstein wants to hold (a), that is, why Wittgenstein wants to reject the ‘Platonist’ conception of rules. In brief, Wittgenstein sees the ‘Platonist’ conception of rules as a failed response to a philosophical worry that our practices of rule-following lack justification that transcends our practices and inclinations. Here one may draw a line of similarity with Minar’s idea that we are tempted to believe that the problem of interpretation is coherent and so there must be an answer to it; our rules must be determined by something available in a perspective external to our practices. And like Minar, Gustafsson notes that Wittgenstein brings out this worry in his consideration of the recalcitrant pupil of *PI* §185 who does not share the same basic inclinations to respond to training. In response to this worry that our rules lack justification in the face of the pupil of *PI* §185, Gustafsson believes that we are led to believe that the expression of a rule must be grounded in something that ultimately determines what is and

is not in accordance with it, in a way that is independent from how we happen to apply the rule. This idea that what gives the expression of the rule its content must be something that ultimately determines all of its applications independently of us leads us to adopt a ‘Platonist’ conception of rules, and believe that such a conception is needed in order to save our practices of rule-following from lacking justification that transcends our practices and inclinations.

However, the unique point of Gustafsson’s view is that he reads Wittgenstein as demonstrating the contradictory nature of this recourse to Platonism: Wittgenstein shows that if rules require something that ultimately determines what is and is not in accordance with them, then this abolishes the ‘seems right/ is right’ distinction, and thus rule-following itself. Thus, the deep problem in believing a ‘Platonist’ conception of rules, according to Gustafsson’s reading, is that this belief leads to the abolishment of rule-following itself. In other words, not-(a) implies not-(b).

So how does this resolve the tension between (a) and (b)? In short, Gustafsson’s reading holds Wittgenstein as believing that the ‘seems right/ is right’ distinction is threatened by the ‘Platonist’ conception of rules, and thus sustaining the distinction requires rejecting this conception. In other words, in order to hold (b), we need to hold (a). Thus, (a) and (b) should not be thought of as in tension with each other but instead as having a supporting relationship where holding (a) is necessary for holding (b). Holding the ‘Platonist’ conception of rules actually obliterates the ‘seems right/ is right’ distinction, and thus it is necessary to reject this conception if we wish to preserve the distinction. This, according to Gustafsson, is why the perceived tension between (a) and (b) is only an apparent one, and it is revealed to be apparent when we consider the alternative of (a), that is, believing in a ‘Platonist’ conception of rules, for this implies having to give up the ‘seems right/ is right’ distinction.

Having given the above summary of Gustafsson’s reading of how Wittgenstein resolves the perceived tension between (a) and (b), we can now go into more detail regarding the specific steps. According to Gustafsson, the idea that gives rise to the tension is the worry that we have no genuine justification for the intuitive notion that our rules determine anything. This worry is brought out in Wittgenstein’s discussion of the recalcitrant pupil of *PI* §185 where Gustafsson claims that Wittgenstein is trying to address the worry that “we have no resources available for providing a genuine

justification for our claim that the pupil does not act in accordance with the rule that we tell him to follow.” (2004, p. 141).

Gustafsson writes that in the face of such a worry, resorting to a ‘Platonist’ conception of rules feels natural:

The feeling here is that we should be able to provide the pupil with a sort of instruction that makes it *entirely transparent* how to go on. It seems as if we should be able to show him something more than mere signs; something which is so constituted that once the pupil has seen it, he cannot but realize that 1000, 1002, 1004, 1006 is the right way to continue the series. (2004, p. 142)

The immediate difficulty with a ‘Platonist’ conception of rules is of course identifying the abstract objects or instructions that are capable of acting as the ultimate grounding for our rules. These instructions, whatever they consist in, must be able to determine the correct application of a rule independently of what we say and do in our practice of using the rules, and they also must somehow be accessible to us such that once we are confronted with them, we immediately realize the right way of going according to the rule. And as one might recall, these instructions are the subject of sceptical scrutiny in KW’s discussion.

However, Gustafsson wishes to point out a more fundamental problem with resorting to a ‘Platonist’ conception of rules, and that is that doing so obliterates the ‘seems right/ is right’ distinction, and hence rule-following itself. We have seen that a ‘Platonist’ conception of rules holds that what determines the application of a rule is an object or instruction with special epistemological properties, such that when someone is confronted with it as that which grounds the determination of a rule he will immediately realize the correct way of following the rule. However, the idea that this object is both the ultimate determinant of the content of a rule whilst also being able to make someone infallible in knowing what is in accord with it threatens the ‘seems right/ is right’ distinction in following that rule. As Gustafsson argues,

[T]o dream of a sort of instruction which cannot fail to make one realize how to go on, is to dream of an instruction which is such that the distinction between obeying the rule and thinking that one is obeying the rule does *not* apply to someone to whom the instruction has been given. That is to say: it is to dream of a sort of instruction such that, once it has been given to me, whatever I *take*

to be in accordance with the rule *is* in accordance with the rule. It is to think that what I call ‘obeying the rule’ and ‘going against it’ in actual cases is *not* a genuine criterion for my having grasped the rule; rather, the only genuine criterion is that I have been confronted with the instruction in question. The upshot on this idea is that if I have been shown this extraordinary piece of instruction then whenever I think I am obeying the rule I am *a fortiori* obeying the rule. No matter what behaviour I take to be in accordance with the rule, that behaviour *is* in accordance with the rule, precisely because I take it to be so. (2004, p. 143)

Gustafsson’s point is that the epistemology of rule-following under the ‘Platonist’ account of rules cannot accommodate the ‘seems right / is right’ distinction. Under the ‘Platonist’ account of rules, once someone understands a rule of say, ‘+2’, he possesses in his mind an instruction (or ‘private content’, in Minar’s phrase) that determines the extension of ‘+2’ for indefinitely many applications independently of anyone’s judgement or dispositions to apply the rule. As a result, he knows what the correct way of obeying the rule is in a way that makes him infallible, and thus whatever he thinks to be in accord with the rule *just is* what is in accord with the rule. The ‘Platonist’ conception of rules thus betrays its purpose of saving rule-following. Gustafsson comments on the irony of the situation by noting that “[w]hat is supposed to be the only way in which [the ‘seems right/ is right’] distinction can be sustained turns out to be a way of obliterating the distinction” (2004, p. 143).

Gustafsson takes this crucial point as the key to dissolving the tension between (a) and (b). He writes,

I hope the reader has begun to sense why I think the apparent tension in Wittgenstein’s discussions of rule-following that I have been talking so much about in this paper is not a genuine tension at all. In fact, if I am right, what Wittgenstein is trying to make clear is that sustaining the distinction between obeying a rule and thinking that one is obeying the rule does not stand in conflict with but *requires* dissolving the idea that what is in accordance with the rule is somehow determined in splendid isolation from the fact that we call certain behaviours ‘in accordance with the rule’ and certain other behaviours ‘not in accordance with the rule’. Wittgenstein’s point is that unless our calling certain behaviours ‘in accordance with the rule’ and other behaviours ‘not in accordance with the rule’ is treated as a genuine criterion for our having

grasped the rule, it makes no sense at all to distinguish between obeying the rule and thinking that one is obeying the rule. And this seems to me to be correct. Hence, the tension is illusory. (2004, p. 144)

So for Gustafsson, the reason why (a) and (b) are not in tension is because holding (a) is necessary for holding (b), and this in turn is because not-(a) implies not-(b); if we were to reject (a) and thus believe in a 'Platonist' conception of rules, we would be effectively obliterating any chance of holding onto (b), i.e., the 'seems right/ is right' distinction in following rules. In other words, Gustafsson is relying on the intuitive notion that two ideas cannot be in tension if one is necessary for holding the other.

### 5.2.3 Examining Gustafsson's argument

But does Gustafsson's argument for resolving the tension between (a) and (b) succeed? In essence, his argument is as follows:

- (G1) The Platonist account of rules cannot allow for the possibility of an individual who possesses the correct instruction for how to follow a rule to be mistaken in what he takes to be in accord with the rule under ideal conditions (where he isn't distracted, under duress, etc.).
- (G2) Allowing for this possibility is necessary if one wishes to maintain the 'seems right / is right' distinction.
- (G3) Therefore, the Platonist account of rules cannot maintain the 'seems right / is right' distinction. (not-(a) implies not-(b))<sup>57</sup>

However, let us examine this argument in more detail. First, is it true that the Platonist cannot allow for the possibility of someone possessing the correct instruction of how to apply the rule of say, '+2', to think that writing '1000, 1004, 1008' is in accord with the rule? To be clear, we are not concerned with recognitional or performance errors in someone following the rule of '+2'. After all, we do ascribe understanding of '+2' to people even if they occasionally make mistakes in following it due to being distracted,

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<sup>57</sup> One might contend that Gustafsson must do more than simply argue that not-(a) implies not-(b). If he wishes to avoid his position from being compatible with scepticism about rules, he must also show how there can be rule-following, and hence the 'seems right / is right' distinction, without recourse to Platonism. In other words, he must show that  $\diamond[(a) \wedge (b)]$ . Gustafsson does not offer such an explanation but I shall not hold it against him here, since our focus is on whether Platonism really does conflate the 'seems right / is right' distinction as he claims.

under stress, or not having enough time to write out a large number series. So we cannot exonerate the Platonist simply by suggesting that someone could make a mistake if he was under duress. Rather, what we are concerned with is whether someone can make a rule-requirement error—making a mistake in believing what a rule requires under ideal conditions, i.e., conditions where the individual is not being distracted or under stress, etc. Given this specification, it does seem that the Platonist is forced to concede that under ideal conditions, if someone possesses the correct instruction of ‘+2’, he cannot make the mistake of thinking that ‘1000, 1004, 1008’ is in accord with the rule.

But let us examine (G2), namely that allowing for the possibility of this mistake is necessary for maintaining the ‘seems right / is right’ distinction. Recall that the ‘seems right / is right’ distinction, in Gustafsson’s own words, relates to there being “a difference between obeying a rule and thinking that one is obeying a rule” (2004, p. 126). Does this difference require the possibility of someone who possesses the correct instruction of ‘+2’ making a rule-requirement error? It does not seem so. There can be a difference between obeying a rule and thinking one is obeying a rule as long as it is possible for people to misunderstand the requirements of a rule, and this is something that the Platonist conception of rules allows. According to the Platonist conception, people who make rule-requirement errors on what ‘+2’ requires are people who think they know what the rule requires when actually they do not, and this is to be explained by the fact that they do not possess the correct instruction of ‘+2’. In other words, the Platonist can explain the fact that there is a difference between obeying a rule and thinking that one is obeying a rule by suggesting that those who think they are obeying the rule but actually do not are those that actually do not have the right Platonic entity in mind.

Moreover, it would be unreasonable for Gustafsson to insist on (G2), for (G1) expresses a tautology. It is tautologous to say that ‘when I have direct access to the correct instruction of ‘+2’ and am in ideal conditions, what I think is in accord with ‘+2’ conforms is what is actually in accord with ‘+2’<sup>58</sup>. In other words, it is unreasonable to expect—as (G2) does—for ‘seems right’ and ‘is right’ to come apart when one possesses the correct

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<sup>58</sup> One might think that this statement is tautologous only if the ‘ideal conditions’ are specified in a trivial ‘whatever it takes’ kind of way that always guarantees a match between what I think is in accord with ‘+2’ and what is in accord with ‘+2’. This thought can be accommodated for our present purposes because it still presents a problem for Gustafsson: if he wishes to point out that this statement is not tautologous then he would have to accept that one can make a mistake in thinking about what is in accord with the rule of ‘+2’ even under ideal conditions, and so he would effectively falsify (G1) and thus his argument becomes unsound.

instruction of a rule under ideal conditions. Such unreasonableness can be traced to the fact that there is no account of rules—Platonistic or not—where it would be sensible to request for the possibility of mistaken understanding given that one has understood the correct instruction under ideal conditions; one is in fact requesting for a contradiction.

Moreover, Gustafsson cannot avoid this charge of unreasonableness by removing the ‘ideal conditions’ clause from (G1), for then (G1) would be false and we would have the ‘seems right / is right’ distinction he denies; if we relinquished the claim that one is under ideal conditions then ‘seems right’ and ‘is right’ can come apart, for one can make a mistake in judging what is in accord with ‘+2’ due to being distracted or tired, etc. despite having the correct understanding of ‘+2’ in mind under the Platonist picture.

To conclude this section, we have so far been discussing how Gustafsson attempts to resolve the tension between (a) and (b), where, according to Gustafsson, the quest to resolve this tension is the main motivation behind communitarianism. His argument was that they are not in tension because not-(a) implies not-(b); Platonism about rules implies abolishing the ‘seems right / is right’ distinction. However, we were able to defend the Platonist account of rules on this point. Whatever other faults the Platonist account of rules might have, its ability to preserve the distinction between ‘seems right’ and ‘is right’ is unthreatened as far as Gustafsson has shown us. Consequently, it seems that Gustafsson has not given us a reason to think that there is no tension between (a) and (b), and so he has not supplied a satisfactory reason for abandoning communitarianism, since—as he says—communitarianism is an attempt to resolve this tension.

#### 5.2.4 Gustafsson’s quietism

We can now move on to discuss Gustafsson’s other justification for quietism, namely his criticism of individualism. Here Gustafsson argues a line similar to Minar by disputing the general idea that there is a determinate answer to the debate in the first place. According to Gustafsson, “*both* [community and individualist readings] are mistaken in assuming that there is a determinate positive or negative answer to the question they are pushing” (2004, p. 131). His reason for this is that

The very demand for such a determinate answer puts too much pressure on our homespun notions of ‘rule’ and ‘language’. Those words have their function in a world where human beings grow up and live together in human societies. I

see no reason to think that the ways those words function in such real-life surroundings somehow contain implicit instructions for how to apply the same words to the behaviour postulated in the exotic fantasy scenario where we are asked to describe the conduct of someone who, miraculously, has managed to grow up in total isolation from other human beings. (Gustafsson, 2004, pp. 131–132)

We can start by blunting the force of Gustafsson’s worry here by noting, just as we did with Minar, that the debate between individualism and communitarianism is not a debate about what the “implicit instructions” are on how to apply ‘rule’ and ‘language’ to every possible exotic scenario imaginable. Rather, it is a debate on whether there is a particular necessary condition to their application, namely whether more than one individual is required for their applications to make sense.

Furthermore, we can grant that our notions of ‘rule’ and ‘language’ are typically applied to humans who have grown up and lived together in societies. But Gustafsson needs to supply us with a more substantial reason for why such typical use exhausts the range of their legitimate use. Without such reasons, it seems that he is open to the following *ad hominem* objection: Given that the notions of ‘conduct’ and ‘growing up’ are typically applied to humans who have interacted with other individuals, won’t this endanger the legitimacy of Gustafsson’s sentence where he describes “the conduct of someone who, miraculously, has managed to grow up in total isolation from other human beings”? To put the problem in another way, what would Gustafsson say in reply to someone who insists that he sees no reason to think that the ways the words ‘conduct’ and ‘growing up’ function somehow contain implicit instructions on how they should be applied to a human who has not had interaction with another individual?

To conclude this section and chapter, it appears that Gustafsson—like Minar—is also unsuccessful in undermining either communitarianism or individualism. Gustafsson’s attempt to undermine communitarianism consisted in first identifying a tension in Wittgenstein’s writings that communitarianism appeared poised to resolve, and showing how we can resolve the tension without appealing to communitarianism. However, Gustafsson’s attempt to resolve the tension on his own was unconvincing, and the motivation for taking up communitarianism remains largely unaffected by Gustafsson. Secondly, his attempt to undermine individualism consisted in doubting the existence of a determinate answer to the debate between individualism and communitarianism. However,

Gustafsson gave us scant reasons to justify his doubt, and left us with more questions about the reasonableness of this doubt than the alternative of believing in a determinate answer to the debate.

## Chapter 6 Summary and conclusions

As mentioned throughout this thesis, the debate between individualist and communitarian conceptions of language is the debate on whether the concept of a rule-follower or language-user is a concept of something that presupposes more than a single individual. However, it would be helpful to reintroduce some clarifications on this debate. Firstly, as the aforementioned characterisation of the debate indicates, the issue at stake concerns a matter of conceptual rather than empirical possibility. This means that even if it is a fact that individuals with our psychological and physiological constitution cannot speak a language or follow a rule without having interacted in some capacity with another, such a fact does not touch upon the question under debate. Instead, our focus is on whether we are guilty of misapplying our concepts if we were to claim that a lifelong solitary individual considered in isolation can speak a language. Secondly, my interest in this debate is substantial rather than exegetical; although many of the discussions relate to deciding what position Wittgenstein would advocate, my focus has been on the arguments for the positions themselves. Thirdly, the debate is not concerned with providing necessary and sufficient conditions for being a language-user. Instead, the purpose of the debate is to ascertain whether there is a particular necessary condition for being a language-user, namely possessing a certain relation with another individual.

Finally, I take it that the burden of proof in the debate lies primarily with those who oppose individualism, for two reasons. Firstly, when there is an issue about the proper understanding of a concept, we accord greater authority to the intuitions of otherwise competent users of that concept than to the conclusions of conceptual analysis. Of course, this isn't to say that conceptual analysis has no significant role to play in resolving such issues, but merely that such analyses bear a greater burden of justification if they are to unseat our intuitions about a concept. Having said this, I presume that most competent users of the concepts of language-user or rule-follower would accept on intuitive grounds the claim that such concepts do not presuppose more than a single individual; they would believe that, as far as the concepts themselves go, there is nothing wrong in thinking that they could apply to a lifelong solitary or someone considered in isolation. Secondly, communitarians bear a larger burden of proof than individualists because they are advocating a much stronger claim: they are claiming that there is no possible world where

an individual who does not possess a certain relation with another can follow a rule or speak a language.

Having given these clarifications, it might be helpful to take stock of the discussion up to now. As we saw in Chapter 2, early individualist commentators such as Ayer take individualism to be true on almost purely intuitive grounds, claiming that the more contentious issue is whether or not a lifelong solitary individual could have a language about his sensations. In turn, Baker and Hacker develop a more sophisticated defence of individualism, appropriating Wittgenstein's emphasis on practice and regularity to suggest that a lifelong solitary individual could be a rule-follower as long as he was engaged in a practice of sufficient complexity.

In response to these early individualists were the communitarians Rhee and Malcolm, whose arguments for communitarianism were shown to lack crucial justification. Recall that Rhee claims that a necessary condition for speaking a language was that one's expression must possess what he called 'independent meaning' (a term that I suggested could be captured by the notion of conventional meaning), and that an expression possesses independent meaning only if it is shared by a community of language users. However, Rhee fails to supply a reason as to why an expression must be shared by multiple people in order to possess independent meaning. Similarly, Malcolm asserts that a necessary condition for speaking a language was that there is a 'seems right / is right' distinction in one's use of expressions, and that such a distinction can only be maintained where that expression is shared by a community. However, Malcolm does not explain why a community is necessary for the 'seems right / is right' distinction, or what is lacking in the case of a lifelong solitary that makes him unable to maintain such a distinction in his use of expressions.

If the debate had ended at this point, then—after taking into consideration the communitarians' burden of proof—it would seem that the individualists would have had the final say. However, as we saw in Chapter 1, KW's seminal treatment of rule-following supplied what Rhee and Malcolm did not: it gives us an *explanation* of the relationship between a community and the concept of following a rule. KW's communitarianism emerges as part of his non-factualist view about meaning, where in the absence of facts that constitute someone following a rule, we must accept that the only way to maintain the 'seems right / is right' distinction in someone following a rule is to consider that individual

in relation to others. So KW's response to the likes of Ayer, and Baker and Hacker would be that they assume that there are facts that constitute someone following a rule that can obtain in the case of a lifelong solitary, and so they are countered by the non-factualism that forms the basis of KW's communitarianism. Consequently, KW can be seen as accepting the burden of proof set for communitarians, and as providing the terms for those wishing to argue for individualism, where they ought to either: (i) provide a straight solution to his sceptical problem by indicating a meaning-fact that can obtain in the case of a lifelong solitary, (ii) show how KW's sceptical solution does not imply communitarianism but is instead consistent with individualism, or (iii) show how KW's sceptical problem is somehow problematic in itself, and thus dissolve it in a way that leaves individualism intact.

As we saw in Chapter 3, many individualist authors post-KW pursued neither of these three options. Instead, authors such as Gillett, Canfield and Haukioja attempt to rely on linguistic intuitions to argue for the conceptual possibility of a lifelong solitary rule-follower. A major theme in each of these authors' arguments is a reliance on the fact that we have no difficulty in imagining a lifelong solitary behaving in ways that intuitively appear to be cases of rule-following. However, this doesn't in any way address KW's argument: KW accepts that his communitarian position is unintuitive due to its rejection of rule-constituting facts, but points out that this position is the result of his attempt to grapple with the sceptical problem about rules. As KW writes, "an objection based on an intuitive feeling that no one else can affect what I mean by a given symbol ignores the sceptical argument that undermines any such naïve intuition about meaning" (1982, p. 69). Thus, in order to defeat KW's communitarianism, individualists must also address the sceptical problem in one of the ways suggested by (i) to (iii).

However, we noted in our discussion of KW that there was one individualist who is exempted from these criticisms, namely Blackburn, who develops a line of reply to KW along the lines of (ii). Blackburn argues that even if we accept the plausibility of KW's sceptical argument and solution, KW's sceptical solution is in fact compatible with individualism. In essence, Blackburn develops a parity argument against KW where he compares the time-slices of an individual with an individual embedded in a community, and argues that there is no relevant difference between the two cases as far as allowing one but not the other to count as a language-user. KW believes that it is only in the intersubjective case that we can make sense of the 'seems right / is right' distinction

necessary for language, but Blackburn points out that intrasubjectivity is just as capable of providing for the distinction. The upshot of all this is that even on our most charitable reading of KW where we grant his sceptical argument and solution, we must accept that his communitarianism fails to convince. Furthermore, this notion of the time-slices of an individual can also be wielded against later communitarian arguments.

We come now to the post-KW communitarians that were discussed in Chapter 4. Here we observed an interesting development in the communitarian position courtesy of Davidson and Verheggen. These two authors argued that an individual need not share expressions with others in order to count as a language-user, but rather that it is necessary for him to have had linguistic interaction with another individual. Unfortunately, Davidson's argument for this modified version of communitarianism suffers from the fact that his necessary condition for language that he claims to be satisfiable only by someone who has interacted with another is in fact satisfiable by a lifelong solitary. Davidson's argument relies on the notion that for an individual's expressions to refer to a determinate object, he must have at some point triangulated at least some of his expressions with another person. However, we showed how it is possible for a solitary individual to triangulate with himself, and so undermine Davidson's argument for communitarianism.

Verheggen's argument for her view that speaking a language requires interpersonal interaction also suffers from lack of crucial justification. Her argument rests on the claim that the concept of objectivity is necessary for language, and that one can possess this concept only through interpersonal interaction. And her argument for this in turn rests on the claim that there is indeterminacy in ascribing to an individual a state where the concept of objectivity plays an explanatory role, such as the state of believing that he has made a mistake or that there is a discrepancy in his observations. Her justification for this rests on the claim that we cannot make sense of a 'seems right / is right' distinction in ascribing such a state to a lifelong solitary individual, i.e., a distinction between 'it seems to him that there is a discrepancy' and 'there is actually a discrepancy'. However, Verheggen does not really explain why we cannot make sense of the 'seems right / is right' distinction in attributing such a state to a lifelong solitary individual but can in the case of interacting individuals. In other words, she does not provide an explanation for what the relevant difference is between the interpersonal case and the solitary one, such that the former allows for the 'seems right / is right' distinction but not the latter.

We now come to McDowell's argument for communitarianism. McDowell's communitarian view emerges from his rejection of what he calls the 'master thesis', i.e., the notion that understanding fundamentally involves interpretation, which he accuses KW of accepting. According to McDowell, we must reject the master thesis because it is highly counterintuitive and leads us into a dilemma of accepting either the paradox of *PI* §201, or accepting the mythological picture of understanding as grasp of super-rigid patterns. And after we have rejected the master thesis, the only way to salvage the idea that one can understand the meaning of an expression without interpretation is to hold that one must have been trained and initiated into a communal custom of using expressions. However, McDowell's reasons for this were surprisingly scant. For even if we accept his claim that in order to use a language, an individual must acquire a capacity to perceive signs as meaningful without interpreting them, McDowell gives us little reason for believing that it is only through communal practice that such a capacity can be acquired.

Williams' communitarian position follows the general structure of McDowell's. Like McDowell, Williams's communitarianism emerges from the rejection of a certain view of meaning and rule-following, and the adoption of an alternative view in which community becomes necessary to make sense of language and rules. According to Williams, there is a 'Classical View' of meaning and rule-following where it is claimed that a practice-transcendent item such as a decision, formula, or instruction accounts for how a rule guides future actions and sets a standard of correctness for those actions. Yet, this view must be rejected because it succumbs to Wittgenstein's regress argument and paradox of interpretation that attack the practice-transcendent item's capability of accounting for the guidance and standard-setting of a rule. And so we must turn to an alternative picture where in order to make sense of the objectivity of rules we must take rule-following to presuppose a communal practice.

However, Williams' reasoning for why a communal practice is necessary for rule-following did not appear to hold water upon closer scrutiny. Williams' fundamental point is that correctness and incorrectness, and hence normativity and objectivity "can only get a hold in our being able to contrast the actions of the individual with the actions of the community", where "[i]t is only in conformity and failure to conform [to a community] that a significant contrast between correct and incorrect action emerges" (1991, p. 113). But as we discussed, even if we grant Williams that a contrast between correct and incorrect action can only emerge from conformity and failure to conform, she needs to

supply reasons for why we need a community in order to have a framework where conformity could take place. In other words, why can't the time-slices of an individual, as suggested by Blackburn, do the trick? Williams does not provide any hints of a response, and given its fundamental importance for her argument, it appears we need not accept her communitarian view.

Finally we come to the quietists, Minar and Gustafsson. These authors claim that there is no determinate answer to the question of whether a lifelong solitary individual can speak a language or follow rules, and so they regard themselves as neither individualists nor communitarians. For Minar, many who think that there is a determinate answer to the question do so out of mistakenly believing in the search for something external to our practices that can determine the extensions of our rules. For instance, communitarians might believe that the extensions of our rules are determined by the dispositions of a community or communal agreement on what a rule requires, where such dispositions or agreement are in principle accessible to an outsider to those practices. And individualists might propose that as long as an individual possesses a practice of sufficient regularity and complexity, where he engages in what might be best explained as corrective behaviour, such an individual can qualify as a rule-follower.

However, Minar argues that it is incoherent to believe in the search for something that is accessible from a perspective external to our practices that can determine the extension of our rules. This is because from an external perspective our rules will not appear to require something that can ground their extensions in the first place, and so we cannot make sense of the need to search for these extension-determining entities. So by undermining the coherence of the search for such entities, Minar believes he also undermines the motivation for thinking that there is a determinate answer to the debate on solitary language. Unfortunately for Minar, we were able to defuse his charge of incoherence by appealing to a move in KW's discussion of the sceptical argument, where we limit our queries about a rule's extension to the uses of that rule in the past, and so take up an external perspective only with respect to those uses of the rule. Moreover, Minar's quietist stance suffers from straw-man arguments against the solitary language debate. One of Minar's reasons for refusing to believe in a determinate answer to the debate is that he takes the proponents of the debate as aiming to supply necessary and sufficient conditions for rule-following, and that this is an aspiration that expects more from the concept of rule-following than it can provide. However, this characterisation of the debate

betrays a deep misunderstanding: what is at issue is not what the necessary and sufficient conditions of rule-following are, but whether or not there is a particular necessary condition for rule-following, namely the possession of a relation with a community.

Moving on to Gustafsson, we saw that he followed in Minar's general footsteps where he attempted to identify and undermine certain motivations for believing in either communitarianism or individualism. Gustafsson's argument against communitarianism relied on his diagnosis of why one might be motivated to take up such a position. According to Gustafsson, the primary motivation is that it resolves a tension between rejecting a Platonist conception of rules on the one hand, and maintaining the 'seems right / is right' distinction on the other. Gustafsson argues that this tension is only apparent, for on closer examination the Platonist conception of rules actually makes no room the 'seems right / is right' distinction. This is because, on the Platonist account of rules, when someone has in mind the 'Platonic instruction' of what a rule requires, whatever he thinks is in accord with that rule is in accord with that rule. And so, because the attempt to resolve this tension is what drives people to argue for communitarianism, Gustafsson's unmasking of the tension as illusory undermines the motivation to take up a communitarian view.

However, we noted that even if we granted that this is true of the Platonic account, it is only in the case when someone does have the 'Platonic instruction' that what seems right to him coincides with what is right. There is still the case where someone does not possess the right instruction in mind, and so what seems right to him in following a rule actually does not coincide with what is the right way of following the rule. Thus, the Platonic account of rules can still make room for the 'seems right / is right' distinction.

Additionally, Gustafsson's quietism suffers from another flaw that is similar to Minar's, where he mischaracterises the stakes of the solitary language debate. Like Minar, Gustafsson believes that the demand for a determinate answer to the debate presumes that there are necessary and sufficient conditions for rule-following and language and so the "very demand for such a determinate answer puts too much pressure on our homespun notions of 'rule' and 'language'" (2004, p. 131). Consequently, the same kind of reply to Gustafsson can be made: the pressure put on our notions of 'rule' or language' by the debate have been greatly exaggerated. We need not presume that there are necessary and sufficient conditions for rule-following or language; in fact, the lack of such presumption

is at the heart of the debate itself, since it is about whether there is a particular necessary condition for such phenomena.

So to conclude, this thesis has been an attempt to settle the question of whether the concept of a language-user presupposes more than one individual. The road to resolving this question has shown how all three sides of the debate thus far have failed to convince: individualists have largely neglected to take their opponents' arguments into account and so beg the question against them; the arguments of communitarians have been shown to lack crucial justification; and the quietists' attempts at undermining either side are shown to rely on misconceptions of the debate itself. Nevertheless, the work done here in considering all these arguments allows us to see that individualism rises to the top of the pile. This is due to two reasons. First, the point made previously about how the burden of proof lies with the opponents of individualism, and second, that we have examined the opposition to individualism and found them wanting. This success of individualism, to be sure, does not imply the refutation of communitarianism or quietism, for they may have advocates in the future that surmount the shortcomings of those presented here. Rather, I am merely claiming that as the debate currently stands, individualism has the upper hand and the onus is on its opponents to come up with a worthy objection to it. This path to defending an intuitive view of language and rules has been a long one, but in the end, as Wittgenstein would say, "philosophy leaves everything as it is" (*PI* §124).

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